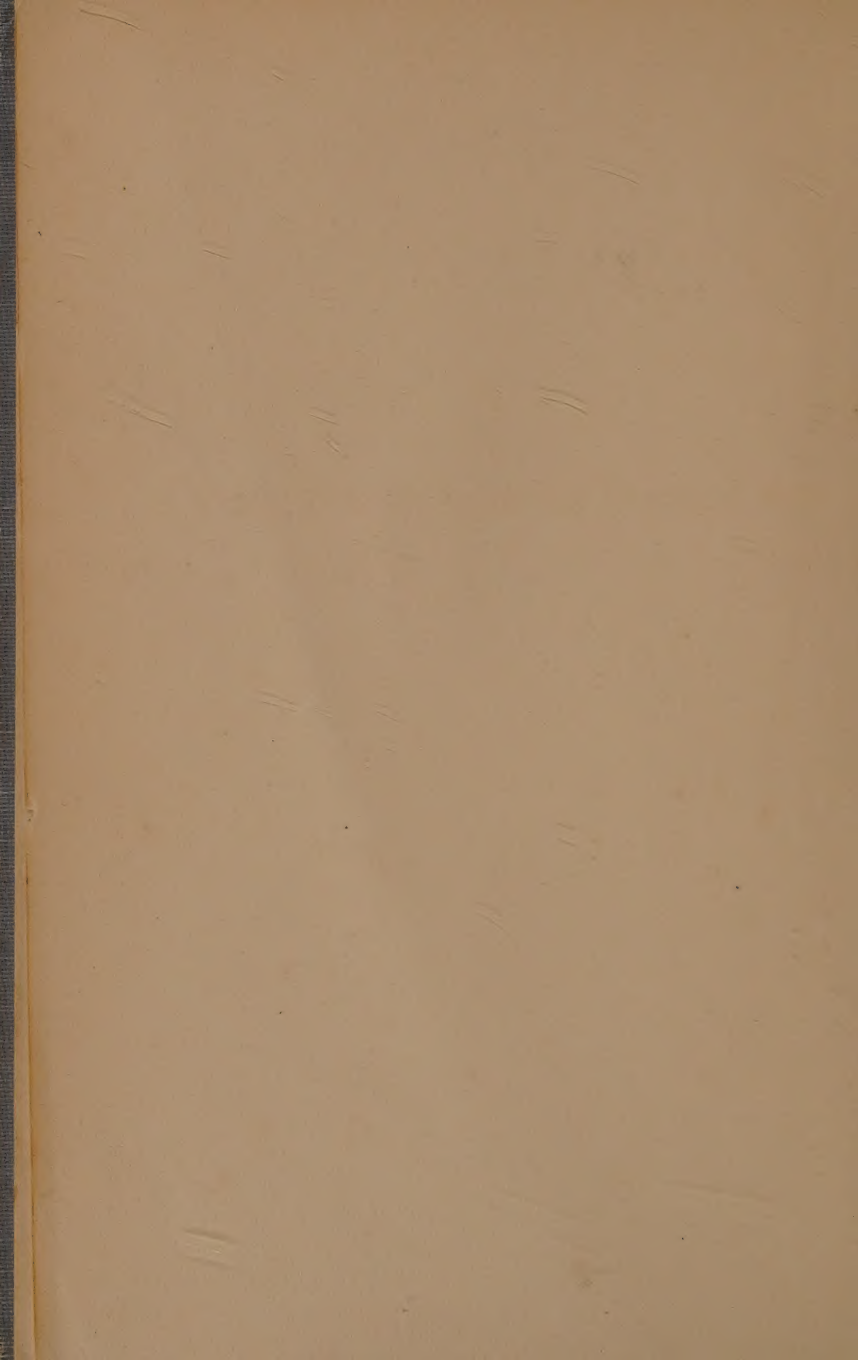


The — Mortover Grange Affair —

by J. S. Fletcher



THE MORTOVER GRANGE AFFAIR.

THE MORTOVER GRANGE AFFAIR

BY
J. S. FLETCHER

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THE MISSING CHANCELLOR,
THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER,
THE AMARANTH CLUB, ETC.



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THE MORTOVER GRANGE AFFAIR

CHAPTER ONE

THE HANDEL STREET FLAT

The third house from the Hunter Street corner of Brunswick Square was distinguished from its neighbour houses by a red lamp, hanging at its entrance, and beneath this lamp, about half-past seven o'clock of a misty October evening, a woman, breathless and frightened, was frantically knocking at the closed door. Had she looked more closely at her surroundings, she would have seen a small brass plate, fixed on the wall of the house, by which attention was directed to the surgery in a side-passage, and to certain periods of attendance thereat, one of which was just then in being. But the woman was much too agitated to notice anything; either from the haste she had made to the red lamp, or from some recent shock, she was trembling all over and muttering incoherently to herself, and when, in response to her beating on the panels, the door suddenly opened, and a young man in a white jacket appeared on the threshold, she had to make a visible effort before she could gasp out two words:

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"The doctor!"

"I am the doctor!" answered the young man, quickly. "What is it?—an accident?"

The woman lifted her hand towards her heart and staggered a little against the door post. Again she made an effort at self control and speech.

"A—a—I don't know!" she said, jerkily. "A man—in my flat! Dead, I think—murdered!"

The man in the white jacket stepped straight out of his door, closing it behind him.

"Where is your flat?" he asked quietly.

"Just round the corner," replied the woman. "Handel Street. This man called on me. Business. I had to leave him in my flat a few minutes—alone. When I went back I found him dead! Struck down by somebody."

"Have you called the police?" asked the doctor. He was already walking quickly towards the corner of the square, the woman hurrying at his side. "Or anybody else?—your neighbours?"

"Nobody! I gave one glance at him and ran for you," she answered. "But—I'm sure he's dead. I—I saw blood! And he was so—so still!"

The doctor made no remark. He turned the corner and went swiftly along to the opening

into Handel Street. There beneath a gas-lamp two policemen stood, talking, and he made up to them.

"This lady says a man is lying dead in her flat in this street—she believes he has been murdered there, in her absence," he said in matter-of-fact tones. "One of you had better come to the flat with me and the other report at the police-station. If your police-surgeon is handy, send him along."

The elder of the two policemen, who had sergeant's stripes on his uniform, gave the woman a keen glance, ending in sudden recognition.

"Miss Tandy, isn't it, ma'am?" he said. "Just so—did a bit of a job for you last year, Miss Tandy. In your flat, eh, ma'am—that's Number 3 in Number 5, I recollect." He turned to the other man and said a few words. "Well?" he continued, as the man moved off towards the adjacent police-station in Hunter Street. "We'd best go up, eh?"

Miss Tandy led the two men up the stairs that gave access to her flat: the doctor, sharp of perception, noticed that the street door of that particular house was open and was apparently always left so until some fixed hour of the evening. Flat Number 3 was on the second floor; its outer door was slightly ajar, as Miss Tandy

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had left it when she ran to the red lamp round the corner. And as she approached it now, she shrank back.

"You go in—first," she whispered to her companions. "I—I'm still frightened about it. Such a shock——"

The police-sergeant pushed open the door and strode in, followed closely by the doctor. They crossed a neat, orderly little hall, and entered a parlour in which the electric light was turned on at the full. In its white glare they saw the dead man—that he was dead the doctor realized as soon as he set eyes on him. He lay crumpled up across the hearthrug—a white skin rug on which there was already a rapidly spreading patch of darkening red—and near him was a light chair, on which he had evidently been sitting when assailed, and now lay overturned between a centre table and the fender.

The dead man's face was full in the light, and the two men took a careful look at him. An elderly man, this—probably sixty, at least. A good-looking man, somewhat worn, and grey-haired, with a well-shaped head and broad, high forehead; a man, decided the doctor, of considerable intellectual capacities. His attire was neat and quiet; his shoes good; his general appearance that of a man in comfortable circumstances. Out of the pockets of his light

overcoat protruded a quantity of papers, written as well as printed.

"All over with him, I suppose, doctor?" asked the sergeant in a hushed voice. "Gone, eh?"

The doctor nodded, and rising from his knees pointed to the dead man's head. "Whoever attacked him must have done so most savagely!" he answered. "He's been struck down from behind by some heavy weapon with something of an edge, a sharp edge on it. Dead!—oh, yes, dead enough!"

"Instantaneous affair, doctor?" asked the sergeant. "Just so! Well, I don't see any weapon about. That poker, now—Lord no, that wouldn't kill a mouse. Carried his weapon off, I should say. But when did it happen? We shall have to get Miss Tandy to give us some information——"

Just then, Miss Tandy's voice was heard in the hall; she was directing somebody to the parlour. A police-inspector came in; a police-surgeon with him. And following them was a little, inconspicuous, unassuming man in plain clothes, who might have been a grocer, a draper, or an oil-and-colour merchant, but whom the other men knew as Detective-Sergeant Wedgwood, of the Criminal Investigation

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Department, attached at present to the Hunter Street Police Station.

Wedgwood listened quietly while the two medical men talked, but while he listened he was looking round the room in which they were all gathered, with the dead man at their feet. He nodded a silent approval when the inspector remarked that the next thing was to hear what the occupant of the flat had to say respecting the affair, and he slipped back into the hall where Miss Tandy was regaining her composure under the ministrations of her next door neighbour.

“You won’t care about going in there, ma’am,” said Wedgwood, with a significant nod at the parlour door. “Perhaps you’ll be agreeable to tell us all about it out here. How did it come about, now, ma’am?” he went on, after signalling the other men to join him. “How came the man here in your flat, and who is he? Of course, some of us know you—you’re Miss Tandy, a professional typist and stenographer, aren’t you? Just so—and you carry on your business here? To be sure. But this man, now? Do you know him?”

Miss Tandy, whom the doctor now saw to be a middle-aged spinster of such well-regulated and decorous appearance that it seemed impossible to associate romance, tragedy, crime, or

mystery with her, made a movement of head and hands that seemed to indicate assent and dissent at the same time.

"Well, I do, and I don't," she answered. "That is to say, I've known him, very slightly, by correspondence, for the last year or two, but personally, not at all. He has occasionally sent me work to do for him, by post. I never saw him, however, until this evening—and I wish I hadn't seen him! This thing to happen here——"

"Just so, ma'am!" agreed Wedgwood. "Very unpleasant! Then you know the man's name, Miss Tandy? And his address?"

"Mr. John Wraypoole, 89 Porteous Road, Paddington," replied Miss Tandy, with business-like promptitude. "That's where I sent his finished work to, anyway. But sometimes he wrote his letters from the British Museum."

"What was he, ma'am? Do you know that?"

"I should say he was a professional searcher—pedigrees—family history—genealogical stuff—all that sort of thing," said Miss Tandy. "That was the kind of work I typed for him."

"Well, and how came he here to-night, Miss Tandy?" asked Wedgwood. "And—what time did he come?"

"He came here a little before seven o'clock,"

answered Miss Tandy. "Perhaps ten minutes to—perhaps a quarter to. Of course, I didn't know him. When I opened the door to him, he told me who he was—Mr. John Wraypoole, for whom I'd done work now and then. I asked him into my parlour, and he told me that he'd come personally to see if I could type two copies—one a duplicate—of a certain manuscript, which he'd brought with him, by three o'clock to-morrow afternoon. I said that depended on its length and nature. He showed me the manuscript. It was of the usual pedigree stuff—stiff work. I said I couldn't possibly do it in the time named. He implored me to try, and offered me double prices. He was so insistent that I said I'd see if I could get assistance. So I went out to see a friend of mine, a few doors away, who is also a professional typist. Mr. Wraypoole, of course, stayed here: I left him sitting at my desk in the parlour, reading. I went to my friend's——"

"Her name and address, ma'am, if you please," interrupted the detective.

"Miss Amy Callender, Number 6 Flat, Number 8 House," said Miss Tandy. "That's on the opposite side. I arranged with her to help me; we decided that we could manage the job by the specified time. Then I came back

here—and found Mr. Wraypoole . . . as you have seen him!”

“How long were you away, Miss Tandy?” asked Wedgwood imperturbably.

“Twelve to fifteen minutes,” replied the typist. “A quarter of an hour at the very outside.”

“Did you see anybody leaving the flats as you entered—when you came back?”

“No—no one!”

“Are those street doors always open—as we found them just now?”

“Always—until eleven o’clock.”

“Then anyone can walk in, and up the stairs?”

“Oh, certainly!”

“Did you leave your door open when you went off to Miss Callender’s?”

“Yes—I left it ajar. It was like that when I came back.”

Wedgwood, who had been making shorthand notes, closed his pocket-book and put it away. He suddenly turned again to Miss Tandy.

“Where,” he asked sharply, “is the manuscript this man brought to you?”

Miss Tandy pointed to the door of the parlour.

“He laid it on my desk,” she answered. “It should be on the blotting-pad.”

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Wedgwood went into the room: within a moment he was back.

"There's no manuscript there," he said.

"It was there, when I left him to go to Miss Callender's," declared Miss Tandy. "I remember seeing it, distinctly. It lay just where it had been put down—right in the middle of the blotting-pad. A manuscript in a brown paper cover, with a white label on the front."

"Not there!" repeated Wedgwood.

"There are papers in his pockets," remarked the sergeant. "A quantity——"

Wedgwood again turned back to the parlour, followed by the police-inspector; the sergeant, after an exchange of whispers with the two doctors went after them. Almost as soon as he had got into the room he was out again: Wedgwood had sent him off on an errand. A brief errand—for within ten minutes he was back in the flat again and at the detective's elbow.

"That's quite correct," he whispered. "I've seen Miss Callender. Middle-aged lady, like this. She says Miss Tandy came to her about this typing business and was at her place the best of ten minutes, perhaps. Well, it's two minutes' walk there; two minutes back. That 'ud about make the quarter of an hour Miss Tandy spoke of." He paused, cocking an eye

at a mass of papers which Wedgwood and the inspector had evidently been examining. "Found it?" he asked.

"No!" replied the detective. "No manuscript at all, such as she described." He, too, paused, as with intent, glancing at the inspector. "On the face of it," he said slowly, when he saw that the inspector was not going to speak, "on the face of it, the thing looks pretty evident. This man has been followed here by somebody who had an interest in that manuscript. Somebody who for some reason or other wanted to get possession of it. That somebody watched Wraypoole enter; saw Miss Tandy go out; came up; knocked Wraypoole on the head; seized the manuscript; vanished before Miss Tandy came back. Eh?"

"Seems uncommonly like it," agreed the inspector. "Got to be sought for, that somebody. Well—there are things to be done."

Wedgwood went into the hall, where, the two doctors having gone away, Miss Tandy sat whispering dolefully to her neighbour.

"Look here, ma'am," he said. "The body will have to be removed to the mortuary. Hadn't you better go somewhere—with this lady, eh?—for an hour or so, while we manage all that. Unpleasant for you, being here, while that's going on. Leave matters to me. And

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if you come back in an hour, you'll find me here."

"The best thing Miss Tandy can do," remarked the neighbour, "is to come home with me for the night."

"Couldn't do better, ma'am," agreed Wedgwood.

He was presently alone in the flat—alone with the dead man, to make arrangements for whose removal the other men had gone away. But Wedgwood showed no particular interest in the dead man. He scarcely looked at him. He had wished to be alone in the flat, though, and as soon as he knew himself to be so, and secure from observation, he went straight to a corner of the room in which he had seen something lying when he first entered it. Now he picked up that something—a fine diamond, escaped from a ring or a scarf-pin.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SECRET MAN

Wedgwood was a quiet, stolid, reserved man, who had learnt how to hold his tongue. He had seen the diamond—or, at any rate, something which he fancied might turn out to be a diamond—on first entering the room, and had said nothing about it to his companions. Now that he held it in his hand, he knew it to be a diamond: he had had experience of diamonds in the course of his professional career. It looked like a good diamond, too—worth a fair amount of money. And it had undoubtedly dropped out of its setting in a ring or a pin. His assurance as to that fact made him examine the dead man's hands and his neck-wear. But Wraypoole had no ring on either hand, and there was no scarf-pin in his cravat. The detective put the diamond carefully away in his pocket-book, and when the police had removed the body from the parlour he locked up the flat and took the key to Miss Tandy. He said nothing to her about the diamond, but he asked her a question or two about Wraypoole.

“Porteous Road, Paddington, was the ad-

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dress, I think, ma'am?" he said. "I shall go along there. This manuscript, now, that was brought you to type?—did he give you to understand that it was at all valuable?"

"He said nothing about that," replied Miss Tandy. "His only concern was about it being done—typed, you know—by a certain hour to-morrow."

"He didn't suggest that it was something—shall we say important?"

"Important that the typed copy should be finished," said Miss Tandy. "Not of special importance in any other way, that I know of."

"Did you look it over?" asked Wedgwood.

"I just glanced it over. It was of the sort that I'd done before for him—genealogical stuff, pedigrees, and so forth."

"Just another question," said Wedgwood. "He didn't give you the impression of being in any fear of anything?—of being followed by anybody, for instance?"

"Oh, dear me, no!" exclaimed Miss Tandy. "He was quite ordinary—a quiet, well-spoken man—quite a gentleman, in fact—very good manners. No!—the only thing he was in any way what you might call anxious about was that I should do the work myself, or be helped with it by somebody I could trust."

“Ah!—he mentioned that, did he?” asked Wedgwood. “Trust, eh?”

“He did say ‘I suppose she’s to be trusted not to let it out of her hands?’ when I told him I should have to give part of his manuscript to Miss Callender. Of course, I assured him he could trust her as he would trust me.”

“Then there evidently was something of a secret nature about the work,” said Wedgwood. “Well, ma’am, I think it’s very obvious that the man who murdered him did so in order to get possession of the manuscript. And—he’s got it! Now we’ve got to find—him!”

He went away on that, and after a brief look-in at the police-station close by, boarded a bus and journeyed to Paddington. And during his half-hour’s journey Wedgwood occupied himself in speculating on his chances of bringing Wraypoole’s assailant to justice. It was too soon to say whether they were good or bad, but of one thing he was already certain: this was no ordinary case of murder. But that it was murder, and intentional murder, there was no doubt. At first, Wedgwood had thought that possibly there had been no intent; that Wraypoole’s assailant had merely meant to stun him in order to rob him of the manuscript. But the doctors had pointed out that Wraypoole had been struck again and again; there was

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plain, unmistakable evidence of at least four savage blows, any one of them of sufficient force to cause almost instantaneous death: the intent of the assailant was obvious.

“Not just the theft of that manuscript,” mused Wedgwood, as he journeyed westward. “That was wanted, sure enough, but whoever wanted it—and got it!—wanted more: to silence Wraypoole. So it comes to this, as I figure it:—Wraypoole knew something—a secret—evidently a mighty important one. He put it, or something about it, on paper—that was the manuscript. Somebody affected by the secret knew of Wraypoole’s possession of it, and of the manuscript. That somebody killed Wraypoole, not merely to get the manuscript but to prevent him from letting the secret out. Who is that somebody? Man?—or woman? However, to begin with—who was Wraypoole?”

Wedgwood was hoping to find that out at the end of his brief journey. Porteous Road was easily located—a short street running between St. Mary’s Terrace and the Harrow Road. Although the daylight had gone long since and there was nothing but a feeble gas-lamp here and there Wedgwood sized up the character of the street before he had walked many yards along it; it was one of those streets of which, as of some people, you can safely say

that they have seen better days. But there was still an atmosphere of shabby gentility about it—just as there was about the faded woman who presently opened the door of Number 89.

“Mrs. Creech?” enquired the detective, who, when he called in at the police-station had referred to the directory. “Thank you. Sorry to trouble you, ma’am—I’m a police-officer—Detective Sergeant Wedgwood. There’s been a sad accident to your lodger, Mr. Wraypoole, Mrs. Creech. I came to tell you.”

Mrs. Creech, one of those women who look as if ill news came to them at regular and periodical times as part of the accepted and necessary things of life, received this announcement with the sigh of one whom nothing surprises.

“Dear-a-dear!” she said. “And him unusual cheerful when he went out this morning! It’ll be one of these motor accidents, I suppose? The streets are getting——”

“I’ll come in a minute, Mrs. Creech,” interrupted the detective. He followed the landlady into a dimly-lighted front parlour. “The fact is, ma’am,” he went on, confidentially, “my news is about as serious as can be—Mr. Wraypoole’s dead! And what’s more, we’ve very little doubt he’s been murdered.”

Mrs. Creech, a tall, spare woman, indefinite

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in everything, opened her eyes and her mouth and stared hopelessly at her caller. Wedgwood saw that she was a very simple sort, with just enough brains to do her bit; he saw, too, that beyond surface facts he was not likely to get much out of her.

"You don't say!" she exclaimed at last in an awed whisper. "Murdered? Why, whoever would want to murder a quiet man like that?"

"He was a quiet man, was he?" asked Wedgwood.

"You couldn't have found a more peaceable!" declared Mrs. Creech. "Three years he's lodged with me—second floor back he had, and a very nice room, too—and I never had the least cause for complaint. Nor him with me. 'Mrs. Creech,' he said to me more than once, 'you and me just suits each other.' As landlady and lodger, of course he meant. Oh, yes, mister!—as regular in his habits he was as that clock!"

"What was he, Mrs. Creech—what did he do?" enquired Wedgwood.

"He did his work, mister, at the British Museum," replied the landlady. "What it was exactly, I couldn't say; writing work of some sort, I believe. Every morning at nine o'clock he'd set off there, with his little bag full of books and papers, and every evening he'd come

home to his tea at six o'clock, and he'd be writing and reading in his room till ten or eleven. Always at that sort of work he was—studying I suppose."

"Do you know anything about his relations, or his friends?" asked Wedgwood.

"I don't, mister. He never had anybody to see him here—never! And I never heard him mention any relations. To be sure, he wasn't one for a great deal of talk. No—I couldn't say anything about that."

"How was he off as regards money?" enquired the detective.

"Well, he always paid me regular," said the landlady. "Every Saturday morning, after breakfast, there was his money, down on the nail! I never remember him being short. He seemed to be what you might call comfortable."

"Did he ever go away—for a holiday, or anything of that sort?"

"He didn't! All the three years he was here, I never knew him go away but once, mister, and that was recently. He was away the better part of a fortnight; in fact, he'd only just come home again. Business, he said—but of course I don't know where or what it was."

"I should like to see his room," said Wedgwood. "We want to find out if he has any relations, and where they're to be heard of."

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Mrs. Creech conducted him to the second floor back and turned on the gas. A bed sitting-room; nothing in or about it at first sight to distinguish it from a thousand similar London lodging-house rooms of its sort, except that a recess was fitted with shelves and filled with books, and that a desk in the window was crowded with books and papers. The landlady looked round it with obvious satisfaction.

"A very comfortable room this is," she said. "Mr. Wraypoole, he partly furnished it himself. That chair there, he said, once belonged to King George the Fourth, and that what he sat to write in was a real, genuine Chippendale. And the pictures on the walls were his."

Wedgwood saw at once that any examination of the desk and its papers would have to be put off till another day. He glanced at the books in the recess—they were all of an archæological or genealogical nature. The pictures were all old prints; one of some size, over the mantelpiece was a fine old copperplate; out of sheer curiosity Wedgwood read the lettering beneath it—*Netherwell Church, Derbyshire*.

"Was there no one about here that Mr. Wraypoole associated with?" he asked suddenly. "No one who knew him?"

Mrs. Creech shook her head.

"I couldn't say that there was, mister," she

answered. "As I remarked previous, nobody ever *came* to see him. And he never went out o' nights, nor of a Sunday, 'cepting for a bit of a walk before his dinner. He was a retiring gentleman."

Wedgwood pursued his enquiries no further that evening. But next morning he went to the British Museum and had no difficulty in finding officials and attendants who knew John Wraypoole well enough.

"Wraypoole," said one of them, "has attended here for quite twenty years, regularly. He was an expert in pedigrees, though he didn't confine his attention entirely to that. He was a good all-round antiquary and I should say very well acquainted with the local history of his own county."

"What county's that?" asked Wedgwood.

"Derbyshire," replied the librarian. "I have discussed Derbyshire with him at times. He had a surprising knowledge of out-of-the-way information. Lately he has been investigating certain matters relative to Derbyshire, but I don't know their exact nature. What I do know is that of late he has had a lot of rare books, pamphlets, and so on, dug out for him, all of them dealing with Derbyshire."

"Do you know if he was writing anything?" enquired Wedgwood.

"He was not a writer. I have heard him say, often, that he had no instinct to write. That is, I mean, to write books, or even articles. He could draw up a pedigree with any man living, or prepare a table of statistics on one of his subjects, but that was as far as his writing went. I should imagine that this manuscript you mention as having been taken by him to Miss Tandy, and now missing, was some pedigree he had prepared. But whose, of course, one has no idea."

Wedgwood considered matters awhile. He was a leisurely thinker, and when any factor in a case was presented to him, liked to meditate on it before going further. "If he'd been coming here all these years, regularly," he said at last, looking round the great dome-topped library. "He must be pretty well known to other frequenters. I mean, there must be somebody here who knew him well, if not intimately."

"I don't think so," answered the man to whom he was talking. "He was a recluse—as far as I had knowledge of him. I never remember seeing him in conversation with anybody here. There," he continued, pointing to a table near at hand, "is the place he always occupied—you'd find him there from ten o'clock until five every day. But I question if he ever spoke to a soul here except to one of us, or to

the attendants who fetched him his books. And by the by, on that table are the books he was busy with yesterday—you can look them over if you like.”

Wedgwood saw little of value in this suggestion, but he was not the man to neglect any chance, and he moved over to the table and inspected a pile of volumes resting there.

“You see?” said his companion, turning the books over and directing his attention to the title-pages. “All relating to local history in Derbyshire. Every one! I told you—that’s been his recent study. But why—heaven only knows! I should suggest you should get hold of some of his papers. Notes, you know—he was always making notes.”

Wedgwood went away more than ever convinced that Wraypoole had been tracked to Miss Tandy’s flat and done to death there by somebody who was so desirous of laying hands on the document Wraypoole had taken there for typing that he was resolved on stopping at nothing to secure it. If only Miss Tandy’s memory was better about it—the description she had given of it was little more than general, and vague at that. And the murderer had got away with the document and there was no clue to his identity—unless the diamond was a clue. To be sure, Wedgwood already had a

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theory about that diamond. It seemed to him a reasonable thing to suppose that it had fallen, being already loose in its setting, from the murderer's hand as he struck down his victim. But . . . he couldn't go all over London searching for a man from whose finger-ring or scarf-pin a stone was missing. . . .

He went round to Handel Street presently, and found Miss Tandy.

"You can't remember any of the wording of that manuscript Wraypoole brought you?" he asked abruptly. "Nothing of it, eh?"

"I remember one word," replied Miss Tandy, promptly. "Just one! Title, I suppose—in big letters, on the brown paper cover. A queer word—or name, *Mortover*."

CHAPTER THREE

THE DEAD MAN'S BROTHER

Wedgwood, fingering his chin as if in deep reflection, slowly repeated the word which Miss Tandy had just pronounced.

"Mortover," he murmured. "Mortover, eh? As you remark, ma'am, an uncommon name that. Does it convey anything to you, now?"

"Nothing!" declared Miss Tandy. "Nothing at all!—never heard it before. But there it was, printed in big letters—his handwriting—on the back of the manuscript, which he'd laid down on my table. I glanced at the manuscript as we were talking about my doing it for him, and saw that word—as a matter of fact, it was the only word on it. At first I thought it was Mortgage—something legal, you know. Then I saw it was Mortover. M-o-r-t-o-v-e-r—Mortover. But whether it's the name of a place, or a person, of course I don't know."

"He said nothing about it?" suggested Wedgwood.

"Not a word!" replied Miss Tandy. "All he was anxious about, and all he spoke of, was having the thing done by three o'clock this

afternoon." She paused, looking speculatively at the detective. "What's your theory about it?" she asked. "I suppose you have one?"

"Looks as if somebody followed him here to your flat, watched you leave it, came in, and knocked him down in order to get possession of that paper," said Wedgwood. "Some important secret in it, no doubt."

"I wonder what, now?" said Miss Tandy. "Interesting, I'm sure. Do you think you'll find out?"

Wedgwood permitted himself to smile. He made a non-committal reply, and went away—to seek the nearest public library. There he consulted the last edition of a dependable gazetteer, only to find that there was no such place as Mortover, city, town, village, or hamlet, in the United Kingdom, and no such name in the London Directory. He wasted no time in looking at a dictionary; though he was far from being a scholar, he felt assured that Mortover was not a word to be found in any of the dictionaries, from Johnson to Murray.

Going back to the police-station, Wedgwood found a man awaiting him; an elderly man, in conversation with the station-sergeant.

"Gentleman's called to give you a bit of information about the man who was murdered last night," said the station-sergeant as Wedg-

wood walked in. "Saw about it in the papers this morning."

"The bare announcement," remarked the caller, turning to Wedgwood. "I knew John Wraypoole. My name is Hilsdale—I'm a second-hand bookseller in Hart Street. Wraypoole often dropped in at my shop. Indeed, he was in there yesterday, about this time—noon."

"Do you know anything about his private affairs?" asked the detective.

"Scarcely anything. I've heard him say that he had a brother—Thomas—a tradesman somewhere in Wandsworth, and that they both came to London when they were mere boys. They came from Derbyshire."

"He—this dead man—was a great hand at Derbyshire history, I'm given to understand," remarked Wedgwood. "I learnt that at the British Museum."

"He was! He specialized in that subject," assented Hilsdale. "And it's just about that that I came round to see you. There may be something in what I've to tell, and there may be nothing at all. But it's this—when Wraypoole dropped in to see me yesterday morning, I hadn't set eyes on him for about a fortnight, which was unusual, for as a rule he looked in nearly every day, when he left the British Museum Library to get his bit of lunch. I

remarked on this fact, and he said he'd been away in Derbyshire, revisiting the old place, Ashlowe, near Netherwell, from which he came. Then he went on to say that he'd had a special reason for going there. 'The fact is, Hilsdale,' he said—I'm giving you his very words—the fact is, I've unearthed one of the prettiest secrets you ever heard of—I got the inkling of it here in London, and I've solved the mystery of it down yonder in Derbyshire. And it'll make nice reading in the papers, my lad—when it comes out!' Of course, I asked him what it was. 'No—no!' he answered. 'You wait, Hilsdale—it's my secret at present!' And I couldn't get him to say more; he wouldn't talk of anything but of the old village and the old folks."

"Did he refer to anybody or any place called Mortover?" asked Wedgwood.

The bookseller shook his head.

"No!—never heard it. Mortover? That's an uncommon word—or name. No!—I've no recollection of it—I'm sure he didn't."

"You're sure he didn't mention to you that he'd been writing something about somebody or something called Mortover?"

"He did not!—I should have remembered that, if only because of the oddity of the word."

"Just keep that word to yourself for a bit, Mr. Hilsdale," said the detective. "I don't

want it to get out, yet awhile, anyway. Now, do you know the address of this man's brother—Thomas, I think you said?"

"Thomas: no, I don't. He has a business—a shop, I fancy—in the Wandsworth district, but that's all I know. I should have thought he would have turned up here—he must have seen the news in the papers."

"Not been here yet, nor communicated with us in any way," remarked Wedgwood. "The inquest'll be opened to-morrow afternoon—if we don't get hold of this brother, I suppose you can identify the body?"

"I can, of course. But Thomas Wraypoole will surely come forward! As far as my recollection goes, John told me, more than once, that there were just the two of them—and both bachelors. You could get Thomas Wraypoole's address out of the directory, you know."

"Just going to look for it," answered Wedgwood, and turned to a bulky volume ranged with other books of reference on an adjacent shelf. "Wandsworth, you say? Um!—well, I suppose this is the man. Thomas Wraypoole, oil and colour merchant, 1023 Wandsworth Road. I'll get on the telephone to him."

Thomas Wraypoole, however, was not to be got at—just then, at any rate. His manager, answering Wedgwood's call, said that Mr.

Wraypoole had gone out just after nine o'clock that morning and had not yet returned; he had no idea where he had gone, nor when he would be back. And Wedgwood, after a few more words with the second-hand bookseller, went off, it being now past one o'clock, to get his dinner and to reflect over it on the events of the morning.

Those reflections led him at the conclusion of his meal in the direction of Porteous Road—he wanted to make a thorough examination of the murdered man's room, and of his papers. But when he presented himself at Mrs. Creech's door, the landlady as if divining his purpose, gave him a significant look.

"If you've come—as you said you would—to go through his things, mister," she announced, "you're too late! His own brother came this morning, early—leastways, before ten o'clock—and he's been in his room ever since, and has only just gone. He's taken a lot of things—papers and such like—away with him in a taxi-cab, and he's locked up all the rest—indeed, he's locked up the room, and I've strict orders not to let anybody enter—not even you, which I told him you'd been last night. He was very particular about it—not a soul to be permitted to enter!"

Wedgwood said nothing for awhile. He was

thinking—thinking that it seemed a very strange thing, a most suspicious thing, that Thomas Wraypoole, on learning of his brother's tragic fate, should make for his belongings rather than for the mortuary where the unfortunate man was lying dead—and unclaimed. Suspicious?—yes, it was undoubtedly suspicious. Why this indecent haste? Thomas Wraypoole must have set off to Porteous Road almost as soon as he had read his newspaper. And there had been little in any newspaper—no more than the bare facts. Surely the first instinct of any decent-minded man would have been to go to the police for further information. . . .

“Carried off a lot of papers, did he?” remarked Wedgwood, abstractedly. “Um——”

“A bag full, mister,” said Mrs. Creech. “And burnt a lot more—the grate was filled with papers he'd burned when he called me up into the room.”

“How did you know this was his brother?” demanded Wedgwood. “You told me last night that he'd never had any relatives to call here!”

“Well, this gentleman said he was his brother,” replied Mrs. Creech. “And gave me his name—Thomas Wraypoole. And you see, mister, there was a family likeness—it struck me that they may ha' been twins, them two.”

Wedgwood left her, and for five minutes stood at the end of Porteous Road, wondering about Thomas Wraypoole's action. He was half-minded to go there and then to Wandsworth, to ask the oil and colour merchant for an explanation. But in the end he went back to Hunter Street, and there, closeted with the inspector who had gone to Miss Tandy's flat the night before, he found the man whose conduct was something of a puzzle to him.

Thomas Wraypoole, as Mrs. Creech had remarked, bore a close resemblance to his dead brother, in superficial appearance at any rate, thought Wedgwood. But Wedgwood had never seen John Wraypoole alive; he had only seen his dead face, which, considering his violent end, was singularly calm and composed when the detective bent over it. Thomas, however, was there before him, alive, very much alive, and Wedgwood was not impressed favourably by his looks. He had the eyes, lips, and smile of a sly and crafty man; his voice was as oily as his business.

"This is the murdered man's brother, Wedgwood," said the inspector. "Mr. Thomas Wraypoole. He's identified the body and he'll attend the opening of the inquest to-morrow. But he can't throw any light on the murder."

Thomas Wraypoole, who was seated in an

elbow chair, drummed silently with his fingers on its arms.

"Can't account for it in any way, gentlemen," he said in a silky tone. "No suggestion to make—none at all. A quiet, unobtrusive man, my brother John, poor fellow! Not likely to have enemies—oh, dear me, no! Wasn't even his own enemy, as the saying is. Sober, respectable, you understand. A mystery, gentlemen, a mystery!"

Wedgwood gave Thomas Wraypoole a good, long look.

"Have you done anything towards solving it, so far?" he asked.

"I? Dear me, no! Oh, no! That, I think, is your job—eh? I—I shouldn't know what to do!"

"I've just come from your brother's lodgings, at Porteous Road," said Wedgwood, pointedly. "You've been there all the morning, examining his effects. You carried away a lot of his papers: you destroyed a quantity of other papers by burning."

The inspector started, staring at the visitor. But Thomas Wraypoole looked back at Wedgwood and smiled.

"Well, mister?" he said quietly. "And what's that got to do with you, or with the police, or with anybody but me, myself? My

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late brother was a bachelor. I'm the only blood-relation he had in the world. Why shouldn't I visit his lodgings and do what I like there?"

"I should have thought you'd have come here first and made sure about him!" retorted Wedgwood.

"I was sure about him! There was quite enough in what bit there was in the papers this morning to assure me that the murdered man was my brother John. No, sir!—my duty was not here, but at Porteous Road. John was dead!—I could do no good looking at him. That could wait. But what he had at his lodgings couldn't!"

"What do you mean, Mr. Wraypoole?" asked the inspector.

"I mean, sir, that if whoever it was that murdered my brother was clever enough to do so in the way he did, he was clever enough to go to John's rooms and get certain papers which it was not in my interest he should get. So as soon as I heard of the murder I went myself."

"What papers do you refer to?"

"Well—papers relating to property—such like."

"Oh!—your late brother had property had he? Much?"

"He had property. House property—and other matters. Now mine, gentlemen. He and I being brothers, and unmarried, we each made a will, I leaving all I had to him, he leaving all he had to me. Naturally, as soon as I heard of his death, I went to his rooms in defence of my own interests. Who wouldn't?"

"You've got all his papers, then?" asked Wedgwood.

"All that matter, mister. But—that's my business. Not yours! I shall attend the inquest, and if questioned, shall give the proper replies. But as I'm sole executor and legatee, I've a perfect right——"

"I don't want to interfere with your rights," interrupted Wedgwood. "What I want to find out is—who murdered your brother? And you might answer a question or two. When did you see your brother last—alive?"

"I couldn't say, mister. No precise recollection, you know."

"Are you aware that he's quite recently been down to Netherwell, in Derbyshire?"

"I'm aware of it now, mister. I didn't know of it this morning."

"How did you learn of it this morning?"

"I found an hotel bill of his from which I gathered that he'd been at Netherwell."

"Have you any idea why he went there?"

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“No more than you have, mister! But—perhaps you have? Perhaps you know?”

Wedgwood vouchsafed no answer to this, and presently, remarking that he should be there when the Coroner sat next day, Thomas Wraypoole took himself off. The detective shook his head.

“Don’t like him—what?” suggested the inspector.

“I don’t!” said Wedgwood. “And I don’t like what he’s told us. One fact’s certain, however, by his own admission—he benefits by his brother’s death!”

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SUSPICIOUS APPRENTICE

Before three o'clock on the following afternoon, Wedgwood and all the world (as represented by half a dozen reporters and a crowd of eager listeners that filled every inch of the Coroner's Court) knew precisely to what extent Thomas Wraypoole had benefited by the murder of his brother John. Thomas, indeed, made no secret of that or of anything. Attending the inquest in company with his solicitor, he proved a ready and an informing witness. He told everything that he knew about John; his history, his occupation, his bit of property, his will—which the solicitor had with him, and was prepared to produce. Everything that John had possessed was left to him, Thomas—and it was about six thousand pounds. Thomas, indeed, was candid to the point of ingenuous confidence. But as to any reason why John should be murdered, Thomas professed complete ignorance: the thing was beyond him.

The inquest was adjourned as soon as the Coroner had finished with Thomas and had

heard the formal evidence of Miss Tandy and the police and their surgeon, and Wedgwood went away to think things over. He, of course, knew more than he had so far divulged; in his opinion his knowledge of whatever it was that lay behind the word *Mortover*, and his discovery of the loose diamond, had best be kept back until he knew more, heard more. But during the next two days Wedgwood heard nothing that was new. The newspapers made much of the Handel Street mystery, but none of their readers came forward to help. Then, when Wedgwood was cudgelling his brains in an effort to see a gleam of light, information came to him from a source which he could only regard as of considerable importance. There walked into Hunter Street police-station on the third evening after the inquest a sharp-eyed, all-alive youth who, after a good deal of cautious inspection of his surroundings and a great many guarded questions as to secrecy and confidence, intimated to Wedgwood that if they two were alone and if anything he said was to be treated as of strict privacy, he could tell something that the detective would doubtless be interested to hear. Wedgwood gave his visitor satisfactory assurances and conducted him to a private room and a comfortable chair;

he himself perched at an adjacent desk and prepared to listen.

"All to ourselves here," he observed, with emphasized re-assurance. "And beyond me, nothing'll go! So—what's it about?"

"This Handel Street affair!" replied the youth, promptly. "Seen all about it in the papers, you understand. Inquest, and all that. And Mr. Thomas Wraypoole's evidence. That's what I've come about—his evidence. And—him!"

"Yes?" responded Wedgwood, encouragingly. "What about his evidence and him?"

"My name's Stainsby," replied the visitor. "George. I'm apprenticed to Mr. Thomas Wraypoole. Oil and colour business, you know—Wandsworth Road."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wedgwood, waking up to the knowledge that here was something of a distinctly promising nature. "To be sure! Apprentice to him, eh? Ah!—then you'll know him pretty well?"

"Sh'd think I did!" agreed the apprentice. "Been with him five years—two to go, yet. Which, of course, is why I don't want anything to get out. Wouldn't do for him to know I'd been to you. Still—there's such a thing as justice, ain't there?"

He looked knowingly at Wedgwood and Wedgwood nodded solemnly.

"Think you can assist, eh?" he suggested.

"Well, I know something," answered Stainsby with a smile. "May be of real importance. Anyway, after hearing all that's been said, and reading what's been in the newspapers, and especially what Mr. Thomas Wraypoole said before the Coroner, I felt I'd got to let out—in confidence—what I know, d'ye see?"

"To be sure!—very proper," said Wedgwood. "And—what is it?"

"This!" announced Stainsby, dramatically. "You know that evening that John Wraypoole was done in, round the corner here?"

"I know it!" assented Wedgwood. "Tuesday!"

"Tuesday it was! Well, that afternoon, about half-past four Mr. Thomas Wraypoole being out at the time, our telephone bell rang. I answered it and found it was John Wraypoole speaking. He——"

"Half a minute!" interrupted the detective. "You knew his voice, I gather?"

"Yes! He's called up his brother on the phone many a time: usually did when he wanted to see him. I told him Thomas was out, and I didn't know what time he'd be in. So he gave me a message for him, which was that he wanted

to see him that evening, and that Thomas was to come and meet him."

"Where and when?" asked Wedgwood.

"That he didn't say. I asked him that, though. He just said that Thomas would know about time and place. Then he rang off."

"Vague—vague!" muttered Wedgwood. He was disappointed. If only John Wraypoole had mentioned place and time! "Well?" he asked. "After that——"

"Thomas came in at a quarter-past five," continued Stainsby. "I gave him the message at once. He went away there and then, leaving me to look after things—said he shouldn't be back before closing time. As a matter of fact, he didn't come back till about nine o'clock—between nine and half-past."

"Came back?—do you mean to the shop?" asked Wedgwood.

"He lives over the shop. I live with him. There's three of us. Him—me—and a house-keeper. He's a single man, Mr. Thomas Wraypoole."

"Well?—I suppose he didn't say anything about where he'd been?"

"Not a word! Him and me and the house-keeper had supper when he came in—usual thing, supper at nine-thirty. No!—he said nothing."

"Didn't just mention that he'd met John?"

"He never mentioned John! And he didn't mention him next morning either—even when he'd read the paper," said Stainsby, significantly. "And he couldn't ha' missed seeing *that* in the paper! There it was, in big, bold letters—I saw it!"

"You saw him with the paper next morning?"

"He was reading the paper—that page, too!—when I came down. Of course, I didn't see the paper until later, but when I did see it, I remembered which page he was reading when I saw him with it. He couldn't have missed seeing *that*!—about his brother."

"Well?—what happened?" asked Wedgwood.

"He kept the paper by him while we had breakfast. As soon as that was over he said he'd got to go out at once on business—legal business, he said—and shouldn't be back until afternoon. He gave me some orders and went away, and he didn't come back till past one o'clock. He'd a lot of papers and things of that sort with him—he was busy with them late that night. Burned a lot of 'em in the parlour grate."

"Did he mention his brother's death to you?"

"Not then. He did next morning—said a word or two to me and the housekeeper about it, when we were having breakfast."

“What did he say?”

“Oh, nothing much! That it was a sad thing, and so far there was no explanation of it. No more than that. Never mentioned it since.”

Wedgwood considered matters awhile, in silence: Stainsby watched him steadily, as if endeavouring to gauge his thoughts.

“What’s your notion, young man?” asked the detective suddenly. “Why do you come here to tell this?”

“I read all that Thomas told in the witness-box,” answered Stainsby. “Why didn’t he tell about meeting John the night before? Where was Thomas the night before? He set out to meet John. And then—Thomas comes into money by John’s death! Six thousand pounds!”

“Do you know anything about Thomas Wraypoole’s circumstances?” enquired Wedgwood. “His business, now?—is it a good one?”

“Not as good as it was when I first knew it,” replied the apprentice. “Fallen off of late—a good deal.”

“He’d be glad of six thousand pounds, eh?” suggested Wedgwood.

“Sort that would be glad of anything in the money line!” answered Stainsby, with a knowing wink.

“Money-getter, eh?” said the detective.

"Close-fisted as they make 'em," replied the apprentice. "He doesn't exactly weigh out the butter nor count the potatoes, but he's next door to it."

"And what sort of man is he generally?" enquired Wedgwood. "Come!—you seem to be a smart chap yourself, and you've been with him at close quarters for five years, so you ought to know him. What sort of man is Thomas Wraypoole?"

Stainsby smiled, and there was an amount of cynicism in the smile that struck Wedgwood as strange in one so young.

"He's this sort of man, mister," he answered. "If there's another man in London who could get round him, I should like to see that man—as a curiosity! But there isn't! He's as deep as—as the bottomless pit! That's what he is!—deep!"

"And clever?"

"Clever as the devil! I've known some of his tricks. Oh, he's clever!"

"Did you ever see John Wraypoole—the dead man?"

"Three or four times. It was very seldom he ever came to the shop. Usually, if he wanted to see Thomas he phoned him."

"The two brothers were very much alike in appearance, eh?"

"Well, they were and they weren't. If you saw 'em apart they were; if you saw 'em together they weren't. John was a quiet, well-mannered man; more of what you'd call a gentleman."

After another silence Wedgwood said:

"And that's all you can tell—at present?"

"Strikes me it's a good lot!" answered Stainsby. "But at present it is!"

"Keep it to yourself—strictly!—my lad, and if you hear more or find out more, come and see me at once," said the detective. "You can rely on me to keep it all to myself."

But without betraying any confidence, Wedgwood had already made up his mind to question Thomas Wraypoole as to his movements and doings on the evening of the murder, and within twenty-four hours of seeing Stainsby he found an opportunity of doing so. Thomas visited the police-station for the purpose of examining certain effects of John's which the police had taken possession of at Porteous Road, and he and Wedgwood met.

"Anything turned up?—any more information?" asked Thomas.

"Nothing!" replied the detective. Then, acting as if the notion had just occurred to him, but in reality working on a previously resolved on idea, he got the oil and colour merchant aside.

"Look here, Mr. Wraypoole," he said confidentially. "I want a word with you. You know you were very open at the beginning of the inquest the other day—about your brother's affairs, and everything being left to you, eh?"

"Nothing to conceal—nothing!" replied Thomas, cheerfully. "Candid nature, mine!"

"Aye, well, that's all very nice and proper, I'm sure," said Wedgwood, "but this world is not without suspicious people, and I've heard one or two remarks about the fact that you're the sole beneficiary under your brother's will."

"I am!" exclaimed Thomas. "What about it?"

Wedgwood gave him a look that was meant to suggest wise counsel.

"If I were you, Mr. Wraypoole," he said in a low voice. "I should just give an account of my movements on the evening of the—well, it was murder, no doubt of it, and we'll call it such! No doubt you can say where you were during that evening?"

"As I happen to have been in my right senses that evening, and as I'm always so, I should say I can, mister!" retorted Thomas. "Are you asking me?"

"Well, if you've no objection to tell——" began Wedgwood.

"None at all!" interrupted Thomas. "The

truth is, I'd a phone message from John latish that afternoon asking me to meet him at the usual time and place: I was used to meeting him occasionally that way. And——"

"Excuse me—but where was the usual place and what was the usual time?" enquired the detective.

"Henekey's Wine House, in Holborn," replied Thomas, promptly. "And the time, all about half-past six. Now and then John would go there for a glass of wine."

"You understood, then, that Henekey's was the place, and the time six-thirty?"

"Of course! And as I'd a bit of business that way, I went off from my shop as soon as I got the message—that would be about five-fifteen. But I never saw John! He never came to Henekey's. I turned in there at six-thirty, and I was there until seven-thirty, but he never made his appearance. So I went home. I'll tell you what I think," he continued suddenly. "What time, now, was it when, presumably, John was struck down in that Handel Street flat?"

"According to Miss Tandy, just about seven o'clock," replied Wedgwood. "Why?"

"Well, it's not many minutes' walk from Handel Street to Henekey's in Holborn," replied Thomas. "I think that John meant to

do his bit of business with Miss Tandy first, and then join me at Henekey's afterwards—he'd know quite well that I shouldn't mind waiting half or even an hour for him. But there it is, mister—that's where I was. And if you know of any misguided person who doubts my word, you can send 'em to make enquiry at Henekey's—they know me well enough there—been going there regularly for the last thirty years!"

Wedgwood felt that Stainsby's suggestion had had all the pith taken out of it; it suddenly became limp. Still, left alone, he was wondering if Thomas Wraypoole's apparent candour did not cover a good deal of duplicity, when a police-constable appeared, to say that a young lady was anxious to have speech with him—about the case.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FIRST STEP

Wedgwood, by this time, was in that mental condition in which any suggestion or assistance about a vexing problem is eagerly grasped at; he bade the policeman bring the caller in, and seating her in the chair which Thomas Wraypoole had just vacated, took a good look at her. She was a quietly-dressed, modest-looking young woman whom he at once set down as being of the shop-assistant or female clerk class, and she was obviously nervous at finding herself in a police-station.

"You want to see me about this Handel Street affair?" began Wedgwood. "Quite so—you can speak freely and in confidence here. You know something, eh?"

"I knew Mr. John Wraypoole," replied the visitor. "That is, slightly."

"Yes?" said Wedgwood, encouragingly. "How did you come to know him?"

"I'm a waitress in the refreshment room at the British Museum," she replied. "Mr. Wraypoole used to come in there occasionally—three or four times a week. Sometimes he'd come in

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for lunch; sometimes for tea. I used to wait on him. And after I'd been there a little time—I've only been there three or four months—he once asked me my name."

"Yes?" said Wedgwood. "And what is your name?"

"My name," replied the young woman, "is Avice Mortover."

Wedgwood woke up to sudden and intense mental activity. Here, at any rate, was something worth listening to! Was it going to turn out that after several days' ineffectual groping in the dark he was now to find the thread of a clue in his hands? But he repressed his eagerness and tried to speak calmly.

"Unusual name, that!" he remarked. "Mortover, eh? Uncommon!"

The girl nodded assent.

"So Mr. Wraypoole said," she replied. "Very uncommon, he told me. But he said that he'd once known people of that name, himself."

"Did he say where?"

"No. He only said—what I've just told you. Then he asked me who my people, my family, were. I didn't know much about them."

"What did you know?" asked Wedgwood. "And—did you tell him what you knew?"

"I told him—yes. It wasn't much at all.

Because, as I say, there isn't much that I know."

"Do you mind telling me?" suggested the detective. "That is, what you told him?"

"No, I don't mind. I think, perhaps, what I told him may have something to do with all this, though, of course, I can't see how or why. Well, I told him that all I knew was that I was born in Canada. My father, I always understood, had gone out to Canada some little time before I was born there. His name was Matthew Mortover. He went to Canada from England, but I don't know from what part. He never spoke of England nor of any relations here: he was a reserved man: mother said he'd a grievance against England or something in England. But when he died last year, she was all for coming back to England, and we came—she and I. Then she died, and there was next to no money, and I had to earn my own living. And I got this work I've told you of. That's what I told Mr. Wraypoole."

"No more?"

"There's no more to tell—it's all I know."

"Was Mr. Wraypoole interested?"

"He seemed so. He asked questions, but I couldn't answer them. You see, I knew nothing, because father never told anything, even to my mother. She knew no more than I did; he

wouldn't talk to her about anything of that sort—family affairs. I said to Mr. Wraypoole that I'd often wondered if I had relations anywhere in England."

"What did he say about that, now?" enquired Wedgwood.

"Nothing, then. But the other day—the day before I heard of his death it would be—he came into the refreshment room for some lunch and said something to me, and it's because of what he said that I've come here, you know—I told the manageress about it yesterday, and she strongly advised me to tell the police authorities at once."

"Well?" asked Wedgwood. "And what was it?"

"He'd been away for a while—I hadn't seen him for a week or two, and I made a remark about it when I got him his lunch. 'Ah!' he said. 'And you don't know where I've been, nor what I've been doing, my dear—you'd be surprised if you did. The fact is,' he said, 'I've found out something about you and your family, and you shall know all about it in a day or two—perhaps to-morrow.' 'Why not now?' I said. 'Do tell me, Mr. Wraypoole!' 'No!' he said. 'Wrong time and place. To-morrow, when you've finished your work.' 'Is it good news?' I asked him. Then he laughed, as if something

amused him. 'You can feel sure of that!' he answered. 'Best of news! Now be patient till to-morrow—you shall know all about it to-morrow afternoon—I shall be ready then.' "

"And then this Handel Street affair happened—that very night!" muttered Wedgwood. "He'd said no more to you than what you've just told me?"

"Not a word more. Of course, I was awfully excited about it. I thought he'd found out that I had some relations living, or that there was money coming to me, or something of that sort, and I wondered what he'd tell me next day. And then, I read about his death in next morning's paper!"

She paused, looking shyly and enquiringly at the detective, and Wedgwood saw what was in her mind. He shook his head, sympathetically.

"You're wondering if I know what it was he was going to tell you?" he said. "I only wish I did. It would solve a good deal of mystery. But—I don't. I know no more than you do."

"Then I've done no good in coming here!" exclaimed the girl, sorrowfully.

"On the contrary, you've done no end of good," said Wedgwood. "You've given me the first bit of real help I've had since starting out! You won't understand yet, though you will in time, perhaps, but the whole mystery of this

case is in that queer name of yours—Mortover!”

The girl looked her astonishment.

“But—why should anybody murder Mr. Wraypoole because my name happens to be that?” she asked. “Why?”

“Ah!” said Wedgwood, smiling at her ingenuous manner. “Now you are asking me something. Don’t know—can’t tell. But there it is—that name of yours has all to do with it, but in what way I can’t imagine, at present. Now listen to me—you’ve said nothing of this to anyone but the manageress? No one? Very good. Now you go straight to her, tell her you’ve seen me, and beg her, from me, Detective-Sergeant Wedgwood, not to breathe a word of what you told her to anybody. And don’t you breathe a word more yourself—till I see you again. You understand?”

“You’re going to find things out?”

“That’s my job at present, my dear!” answered Wedgwood, with a smile. “Who knows? I may find out what it was that John Wraypoole was going to tell you, and if I do you may depend on me not to keep you waiting.”

When she had gone he remained some time alone thinking matters over: eventually he sought the company of the inspector with whom

he had first gone to Miss Tandy's flat. And to him, as a man of experience, he laid bare all that he himself now knew, including the details of the name *Mortover* on the cover of the manuscript brought by John Wraypoole to Miss Tandy for immediate typing and the discovery of the loose diamond in the corner of the typist's parlour. The inspector listened in absorbed silence.

"Formed any theory on all this, Wedgwood?" he asked at last.

The detective allowed a minute or two to elapse before replying, and when he spoke his tone was that of a man who suggests rather than theorizes.

"I've felt all along that there was a lot—everything, perhaps—in the word or name *Mortover*," he answered. "The manuscript that John Wraypoole brought to Miss Tandy was labelled *Mortover*—just that one word. It disappeared during the quarter of an hour in which she was absent from her flat. Whoever killed John Wraypoole carried away the manuscript; probably he killed Wraypoole in order to possess himself of the manuscript."

"And—to silence him as regards what was in the manuscript?" suggested the inspector. "It was pretty evident that the murderer had struck to kill—those had been savage blows!

One blow would have stunned Wraypoole and allowed his assailant to get off with the manuscript. But there were three or four blows—any one of them, said the doctors, sufficient to cause death. That surely means that in the manuscript and in John Wraypoole's consciousness there was a secret. The murderer kills Wraypoole to silence him, and steals the manuscript to destroy it. But—the secret?"

"Mortover is an uncommon name," said Wedgwood. "I never heard it before applied to either place or person. But here's a young woman who says it's her name, and evidently John Wraypoole knew it. Then John Wraypoole tells this young woman he'd found out something about her—good news for her, he suggests. He had been away—I know where. To his own native place, Netherwell, in Derbyshire. I think he'd known people of the name of Mortover there, in his early days: I think he made some discovery about them while he was down there, recently. Perhaps he found out that this girl is entitled to money? Anyway, he made some discovery while he was there at Netherwell, and in my opinion he put the results of that discovery in the manuscript he took to Miss Tandy to get typewritten. Eh?"

"I'm with you!" assented the inspector. "Sound all through, that!"

“Well,” continued Wedgwood, “the thing is—who got to know that Wraypoole knew a secret connected with this girl, Avice Mortover, and that the secret was in that manuscript? Somebody did! That somebody is probably the murderer. So far, there isn’t the slightest clue to his identity. But there are certain things I’d like to know. One is—did Thomas Wraypoole see John before John went to Miss Tandy’s flat? Did he see him for even ten minutes, five minutes?—not at Henekey’s, but somewhere else. He may have done—he’d plenty of time. Had he seen him when he himself turned in at Henekey’s—was the arrangement between them he, Thomas, was to wait at Henekey’s while John went to Miss Tandy’s? If they had met, did John tell Thomas the result of any investigation he’d been making down at Netherwell? Had he told him something before ever he went to Netherwell?”

“You don’t trust Mr. Thomas Wraypoole?” suggested the inspector.

“No!” said Wedgwood, sharply. “In my opinion he’s as clever as he’s unscrupulous—both highly developed. I think he knows a lot that he’s no intention of telling.”

“But as to actual guilt?” asked the inspector. “Didn’t he tell you that he could prove that at

the very time his brother was murdered he himself was at Henekey's?"

"He did!" assented Wedgwood. "And I've not the least doubt that he could: I'm quite sure he wouldn't boast that he could if he couldn't. Oh, yes, I've no doubt whatever that at seven o'clock, when John was murdered, Thomas was taking his ease at Henekey's wine-house—no doubt! But——"

"Well?" asked the inspector as Wedgwood paused significantly. "But—what?"

"There may have been another man," answered Wedgwood, with a meaning glance. "Put up to it by Thomas! As I've said before—did John and Thomas meet that evening? Did John tell Thomas something which Thomas knew to be either against his own interests or the interest of somebody with whom he's closely concerned? Once more—there was plenty of time for the two brothers to meet between Thomas leaving his place in Wandsworth Road and his going to Henekey's."

The inspector rubbed his chin, reflecting over certain features of the case.

"What I didn't like about Thomas Wraypoole," he remarked presently, "was his indecent haste in rushing to Porteous Road the morning after his brother's death! Any right-minded man would have come here first."

"You know his excuse?" said Wedgwood.

"That whoever was clever enough to murder John as John had been murdered was clever enough to secure John's papers," answered the inspector. "Oh, yes, I know that, but I didn't accept it!"

"Nor do I," said Wedgwood. "I think Thomas Wraypoole went to Porteous Road to lay hold of and to destroy certain papers, either known to him, or the existence of which was guessed at by him, connected with the secret in that Mortover manuscript. That's what I think—now!"

"What is the secret?" muttered the inspector.

"Man murdered — manuscript disappeared! Stiff proposition!"

"Well," said Wedgwood, "it seems to me that there's only one thing to be done. John Wraypoole, in my opinion, discovered that secret at Netherwell. I ought to go down to Netherwell, to see if I can discover it."

"Good!" agreed the inspector. "I think you should go at once. Derbyshire, eh? Netherwell—what is it?"

"Small market town, in a wildish district," replied Wedgwood. "I'll put up at the hotel in which John Wraypoole stayed. Thomas says he has John's hotel bill, but I shan't let Thomas know I'm going. And while I'm gone,

it will be advisable for somebody to keep an eye on Thomas."

"We'll see to that!" said the inspector. "Unobtrusively, of course. Queer case altogether this, Wedgwood," he went on, as they rose from their conference. "And the queerest thing about it, to my mind, is the ease with which the murderer did his job and got clear away! Now what do you make of that?"

Wedgwood shook his head with a suggestion of finality.

"That John was very carefully followed when he went to Miss Tandy's!" he answered.

CHAPTER SIX

THE COMPANY PROSPECTUS

Wedgwood went down to the police-station early next morning, all ready and equipped for his journey into Derbyshire. He had thought out his plan of campaign the previous evening; although it was now so late in the year he would go to Netherwell in the character of a leisured tourist, put up at the best inn he could find, look round him, keep eyes and ears open, and trust to luck to hit on something that had to do with his proper business. Experience had taught him that luck had a good deal to do with success in his profession—you heard a chance remark here; you saw a significant thing there; it was up to you after seeing one or hearing the other to take advantage of what you had heard or seen. And in this case he felt sure that he was going where things were almost certain to be seen and heard: John Wraypoole had just been there; John Wraypoole had made some discovery there—now it was his, Wedgwood's, job to find out the nature of that discovery.

The inspector met him as he walked into the

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office with his coat and bag, and gave him a significant glance.

"Off?" he asked.

"Going to catch the ten twenty-five for Derby at St. Pancras," replied Wedgwood. "Plenty of time, though. Anything you want me for?"

The inspector beckoned him into an inner room, with the air of a man who has something alike pertinent and mysterious to impart.

"Seen this morning's papers?" he asked.

"No," answered Wedgwood. "No time, so far—see 'em in the train. Why—anything in them?"

The inspector produced a copy of the *Times* and spread it out on a table. "Look at that!" he said. "There's something to ponder over—considering what we know already."

Wedgwood bent over the page spread before him: a page invariably devoted in the *Times* to advertising the prospectuses of new companies. And there, headed by great, block letters, running across the width of three columns he saw an advertisement that made his eyes open to their widest. He slowly muttered the wording of the first lines:

"A copy of this Prospectus has been filed with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies.

Application will be made to the Committee of the Stock Exchange, London, for permission to deal in the shares of this Company after allotment, and for a Quotation. The Subscription List will close on or before Friday the 31st day of October, 1913.

MORTOVER MAIN COLLIERY COMPANY LIMITED

(Incorporated under the Companies Act, 1908)

Capital.....£1,500,000

Divided into 1,500,000 Shares of £1 each
of which

1,400,000 Shares are now offered for Subscription at 21s. per Share.”

and from there went on, in silence, to pore over the names of the directors, bankers, solicitors, brokers, his wonder of speculation increasing with every paragraph he read. The inspector thrust a finger forward and placed it on a line of the prospectus.

“See that?” he exclaimed. “One of the directors is Philip Mortover, Esquire, of Mortover Grange near Netherwell, Derbyshire, who will join the board after allotment. And see there again—the company’s formed to acquire the freehold property of this Philip Mortover and to develop the coal underneath it, and so

on and so on. Now, who is this Philip Mortover, and what's he got to do with the name on that manuscript that was stolen when John Wraypoole was murdered, and with that girl who came to see you yesterday? The name's too uncommon to allow one to think that all this is a mere coincidence! What do you think, Wedgwood?"

"That I shall have to be extremely careful in my work when I get down there!" said the detective. "That's what I think!"

"You'll go—after seeing this?"

"Why not?"

"Two of the directors," answered the inspector, putting his finger on the paper again, "live in London, you see. Information might be got from them—they seem to be men of position and substance. Then, the solicitors and brokers are in London—they could be approached——"

"No!" said Wedgwood. "I'll go to the fountain-head—where Wraypoole had just been. Seems to me that he discovered something about this affair, and that the girl, Avice Mortover has—or, perhaps, ought to have—something to do with it. No! I'll get down to Netherwell and find out what I can on the spot. Of course, what I do want to find out is—what John Wraypoole was doing, or trying to do, or actually did

while he was there! In that, in my opinion, is the secret of his murder."

"Well, keep us posted," said the inspector.

Wedgwood promised and went off. He bought several newspapers before getting into the train; each contained the prospectus of the Mortover Main Colliery Company, Limited. Wedgwood read it through more carefully and had soon got the hang of it. Mining experts had discovered the presence of a highly valuable seam of coal on the freehold estate of Philip Mortover, Esquire, of Mortover Grange; the company was being formed to acquire that gentleman's rights and to work the coal—that was the whole thing in a nutshell. And, of course, Philip Mortover as vendor was to have an enormous price for what he was selling.

Wedgwood reached Netherwell early in the afternoon, and making his way to what was recommended to him by the station-master as the best hotel in the place, found himself in a sleepy little market-town of grey-walled, stone-roofed houses, set amidst dark and black hills: at that time of the year an unfriendly and almost forbidding country. But the hotel, an old-world house, was warm and comfortable, and the folk who kept it were evidently prodigal of coal, and when Wedgwood had warmed himself at an immense fire in an old-fashioned par-

lour and had drunk a cup or two of scalding hot tea he decided that he might have found a worse base for his operations. This hotel, too, had been, as he knew, the base of John Wraypoole's operations; a word or two from himself to landlord or landlady would doubtless produce a certain amount of reminiscence of the dead man's recent visit. But Wedgwood said nothing of any knowledge of Wraypoole: his notion was to go slow and keep an intelligent look-out.

Himself a country-bred man, Wedgwood knew that if you want to hear the news of any market-town or rural neighbourhood there is no better place in which to pick it up than the inn-parlour, of an evening. Thither resort the gossips and wise-acres of the place; the news which circulates from one to the other differs vastly from that obtainable in the columns of a newspaper in that it is first-hand, un-edited, and unexpurgated; where the over-scrupulous editor or sub-editor is afraid of a possible suit for libel, your true tavern-knight fears none. And when Wedgwood had eaten his modest dinner he sought out the bar-parlour and with his pipe in his mouth and a glass at his elbow posted himself in a comfortable corner and prepared to keep his ears open.

The room was empty when he entered it, save

for the presence of a barmaid who presided over a counter in a corner near the fire, and Wedgwood after an exchange of civilities with her, picked up a local newspaper that lay near and glanced over its contents. There he once more encountered the prospectus of the Mortover Main Colliery Company, and for the third or fourth time re-read it. He had just laid the paper aside again when a couple of men of the prosperous tradesman type bustled in, greeted the barmaid with the easy familiarity of regular customers, and arming themselves with liquid refreshment, lighted cigars and relapsed into elbow chairs to take their ease. One of them picked up the newspaper which Wedgwood had laid down: the Mortover Main prospectus face uppermost. He drew his companion's attention to it.

"See they've got that Mortover Colliery advertisement in here," he observed. "Spending a tidy lot in advertising! It's in all the London papers this morning."

"Manchester papers, too," said the other man. "Going in for it?"

"Well, I don't know—at least, I don't know about applying for shares straight off," replied the first. "They'll be on the market, you know. Are you?"

"I think I shall go in for a few," said the

second. "According to all accounts, it's highly promising."

"They've certainly got highly-flattering reports from the mining experts," remarked the first man. "All this"—indicating the advertisement—"is, of course, what they term rose-coloured. But I've heard, privately, that it's no more highly-coloured than it deserves—they say it's likely to turn out one of the richest beds of coal in these parts."

"Piece of rare luck for young Mortover, anyhow!" said the second man, with a somewhat cynical laugh. "Talk about a sudden change of fortune—there's an instance for you, if you like. I used to think that Mortover property about as dismal a bit of country as you could set eyes on—worth nothing!"

"Why, and it wasn't worth anything!" agreed the other. "I question if any Mortover ever raised a blade of corn from it—and they say there's been Mortovers there since Henry the Eighth, or maybe Seventh's time. And what grass there was on it wouldn't feed a sheep—poor, starved land always!"

"Aye, well, it had the right stuff underneath it all the time!" remarked the second man. "Only wanted an expert's sharp nose to smell it out!"

"Who did get the first notion?" asked the

first speaker. "I've heard different accounts."

"So have I. I did hear that the very first thing was that some tourist in these parts hinted to young Mortover that in his opinion there was coal under the Mortover Estate and advised him to call in a mining expert. Then I heard another tale—that a gentleman who was staying at Buxton got the same notion, and began approaching young Mortover about it. Two or three heads were put together about it, I fancy."

"Well, there's one thing certain!" said the man who had picked up the paper. "The money for all these preliminaries wouldn't be found by Philip Mortover! Poor as starved crows in winter those Mortovers have been for a long way back—we know that, here in Netherwell. And it would cost a tidy lot all that initiatory work!"

"Oh, it's pretty well known who financed the first beginnings!" replied the other man. He pointed the end of his cigar to a name on the list of directors. "That chap—a London man. Charles Bruno Levigne, Esquire, 581 Cleveland Square, London. Company Promoter. Seen him down here many a time—used to drop in this house now and then, didn't he, Mary, my dear?"

"Mr. Levigne?" responded the barmaid.

“Yes, Mr. Appleyard, he’s stayed here several times last year and this, for a day or two. He’s not been here so much this year as last, but he was here only three weeks ago.”

“That’s the man who found the money to start with,” said Mr. Appleyard. “And, of course, he’s now a director.”

Mr. Appleyard’s companion laughed, cynically.

“Aye, well, they’ll have need of some London brains on the board of directors if young Mortover’s one!” he said. “I should say he’s about as fit to direct anything as that poker is! Never knew him do anything but loaf round his old house with his hands in his pockets.”

“Oh, well, I suppose as the land was his, they’ve put him down as a director!” said Mr. Appleyard. “There’s four or five more of ’em—Mortover’ll just acquiesce in what the others do. He’s safe, anyhow—rich man now, what with selling the land and mineral rights to this company, and what he’ll get on his shares. I’ve no doubt this mine’s going to pay——”

The two cronies plunged into a discussion of the relative merits of local coal-mining enterprises, and Wedgewood, with a nod to the barmaid, went off to another room to look for writing materials. He wanted to write a letter—but before beginning it he sat for some little

time thinking, trying, indeed, to recall something.

Charles Bruno Levigne—where had he heard that name before, and in connection with what? Some case in which he had been engaged, years before, he felt sure, but what particular case he could not recall. He had a vague notion that it was a case of fraud, in the City, and that Levigne was a witness, or an interested party. His memory failed to respond, and presently he wrote a letter to the colleague asking him to enquire quietly into the status, financial and otherwise, of the man of whom he was thinking. For there was a strong impression, however chaotic, in Wedgwood's mind that this Charles Bruno Levigne's record, as outlined in the by-gone case he was thinking of, was somewhat shady.

Wedgwood set out next morning after a leisurely breakfast, to make his way to Mortover Grange. He had no difficulty in finding it—the Mortover property, he was told, on which the new colliery was being made, lay at the end of the valley, some three miles away. About eleven o'clock of a raw, misty, October morning he came to it, a dreary, featureless expanse of flat, dank land amongst the hills, in the centre of which crowds of men were at work on the surface equipment of the pit. Wedgwood visu-

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alized how that pit would transform the district—but he was not so much concerned with the colliery and its prospects as with the ancient home of the Mortovers. A turn in the road brought that in sight—an old, old house, high-gabled, dark, mysterious, set in a hollow of the hills.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MORTOVER GRANGE

Wedgwood took a good look at this venerable survival of a past age before he approached nearer. As a countryman born and bred he had some knowledge of old houses, and he knew that in this he saw one that had lasted for many and many a generation: had he possessed more technical knowledge of such things he would have been able to fix an approximate date for its buildings, for over the entrance a Tudor rose and a portcullis, the badge of Henry VII, denoted that it had been erected at some date between the years 1485 and 1509. There was more heraldic carving about the front, and that and the timbered walls, quaint chimneys, and whitewashed gables made a picture against the dark hillside at the back. An eerie place, thought the detective—the sort of house in which there were, no doubt, secret hiding-places; passages, the whereabouts of which was only known to the family; dark rooms and recesses the very atmosphere of which would suggest mystery and romance. And there was an air of gloom and silence about the whole

place; not a sign of life was to be seen around it, not a face at its windows. But from one of the fantastically-shaped chimneys a thin wisp of blue smoke curled into the heavy October air.

As he stood there watching, Wedgwood summarized what he knew of the family that inhabited this ancient house. Not much—and that only gained by hearsay; the gossip of the previous evening. Mortover—that was the name. Had been there for hundreds of years. Owned land that had been unproductive. Poor—miserably poor, if Appleyard and his companion were to be credited. The present owner was Philip, who was to be rich because coal had been discovered under his dank acres. And he—still according to Appleyard—was a young man of no great account, and likely to be no more than a figure-head on the directorate of the colliery. That was about all.

But . . . what about this girl in London; this Avice Mortover in whom John Wraypoole had taken some interest and had made some discovery, and who had come to him, Wedgwood, with her story? In what relation did she stand to this Mortover of Mortover Grange? What had John Wraypoole discovered about her and about that relationship—if any—when he was down in these parts? And what was

there in that manuscript which John Wraypoole had brought to Miss Tandy, the cover of which bore one word—*Mortover*?

“Nice assortment of things to find out!” mused Wedgwood. “However—here, surely, is the place to start work at. And one may as well begin.”

He wanted to enter Mortover Grange; to see and have speech with its inhabitants, in particular with its owner, the Philip Mortover whose name had appeared in so many newspapers the day before. And he was thankful that he had a good and plausible excuse for knocking at the door. Wedgwood had a hobby; he spent much of his spare time in sketching and had he been able to give more attention to it would have done well as an artist. In a deep inside pocket of his overcoat he carried a sketching-block and a case of pencils, and smiling at the thought of their present usefulness he made his way along a neglected carriage-road to the front of Mortover Grange, and stepping into the darkness of a stone porch knocked at a door which looked as if it were rarely opened.

It was a long time before any response was made to the detective's summons. He had knocked three times and was thinking of trying another entrance when he heard the sound of obviously rusty bolts being drawn on the other

side of the iron-studded panels. The door creaked, groaned, as if it were a live thing in pain; then it swung slowly back, and he saw standing on the threshold of a cavernous entrance hall a girl who, from her general appearance and attire, was no country maiden but a smart young lady from London. She was a tall, pretty girl, probably eighteen or nineteen years of age, very much out of harmony with her surroundings, and she stared wide-eyed at the detective as if he had fallen from the clouds. But she spoke before he could.

"They never open this door!" she said, smiling. "I just happened to hear——"

"Sorry to give so much trouble," Wedgwood hastened to say. "Is the master at home?"

The girl retreated into the hall, and at the foot of a wide staircase raised her voice.

"Aunt Janet!" she called. "Aunt Janet! Come down—here's a gentleman——"

Before she could say more a woman came into view, emerging from an open doorway half-way up the stair. She was a tall, gaunt woman, full of angles; elderly, and probably grey-haired, but of her hair Wedgwood, keenly observant of her as of everything about him, could see nothing; for her head, from just above the level of her eyebrows to the nape of her neck was tied up tightly in a bright yellow and

red handkerchief, pirate-fashion. The face beneath it was as remarkable as the unusual headgear—a sharp-featured, dark-hued, much-wrinkled face, with innumerable lines about a pair of thin lips and another pair of bleary, watchful eyes, black as sloes and curiously lambent. A strange woman this, thought the detective; probably as odd in character as in appearance: he watched her still more narrowly as she came towards him along the stone-flagged hall. And he saw that she was watching him as observantly as he was watching her, and that watchfulness, mingled largely with suspicion, was as a second nature to her.

“What is it?” she asked in a hard, emotionless tone. “What might you be wanting? If it’s anything about the colliery——”

“No, no, ma’am!” broke in Wedgwood hurriedly. “Sorry to give you so much trouble! I was just walking this way, on pleasure, and I thought I’d like to make a drawing of this fine, old house—I’m a bit of an artist, you see,” he went on with a laugh, as he drew his sketch-book from his pocket and opened it at a page on which was a nearly-completed sketch. “Not often one comes across such a house as this, you know!”

The woman made no immediate reply; she

was still watching him, and the suspicion in her dark, glowing eyes was increased.

"Why, I don't know," she said, coldly. "Seems a queer time of the year to come a-pleasuring—nasty, damp weather like this—and as to making pictures of the house, I don't know how the master would be for that, I'm sure. Who might you be, and where do you come from—we're not favourable to strangers hereabouts."

Before Wedgwood could make any retort to these inhospitable remarks, a young man, carelessly dressed in rough country garments, untidy and unshaven, and with his hands thrust in the pockets of his riding breeches, came out of a door close by, and lounged forward. He was an oaf in appearance, thought Wedgwood, and he was not surprised to hear a voice as surly in accent as the lips from which it came were sullen and stupid in appearance.

"What's afoot?" asked the young man, staring furtively at the stranger. "What's he want, Janet?"

"Nay, some make of foolishness!" replied the woman, drawing aside. "Picture-making, or something soft—it caps me how folk can find time for such games—I can't, anyways!"

She retreated down the hall again, and

Wedgwood turned to the young man who stood lumpishly watching him.

"Merely your permission, sir, to make a sketch or two of your lovely old house—if you've no objection," said the detective. "I could have drawn it from the road outside, but I wished to be polite."

The young man laughed—the laugh of a man who scorns what he has no understanding of.

"Oh, you can draw the place if you like—no objection!" he answered, churlishly. "Do you want to come in?"

"Thank you, sir, no!" answered Wedgwood. "I'll select a favourable point from your courtyard. Many thanks to you."

He lifted his hat to the girl, who during the conversation had lingered at the door, and recrossing the cobble-paved yard selected a suitable angle from which to make his sketch, and perching himself on a low wall began to work. The door closed again; he heard bolts drawn and keys turned. But at the end of half an hour when he had completed an outline of walls and gables, the girl suddenly rounded a corner of the house and, shyly smiling, came up to him.

"May I look?" she asked. "I like pictures."

"Certainly—but there's not much of a picture so far," answered Wedgwood. "I'm only

making a rough sketch, you know. Do you draw?"

"No!" she said with a decisive shake of the head. "I've never gone in for that. I can play the piano, though—that's what I go in for. I wish they'd a piano here—I was disappointed when I found they hadn't—I've never been in a house without a piano before."

"You don't live here, then?" asked Wedgwood, going on with his sketching. "This isn't your home?"

"Me—live here? No—I live in London—Tooting Common. My word, no—I shouldn't like to live here. Miles away from anywhere! I'd no idea it was such a lonely place. No—I just came on a visit—came back with my aunt for a few days after she'd been stopping with us at Tooting. She thought it would do me good—country air and all that. But I don't know—I think London air's as good as this, any day!"

"I daresay!" agreed Wedgwood. "Fine air down Tooting Common way—used to live that side myself once. That your aunt I saw just now?"

"Aunt Janet, yes, Mrs. Clagne, her name is. Mr. Mortover's housekeeper. That was Mr. Mortover you saw, too. He's just going to buy a motor-car. A lot of money's coming to him

now, because of the coal-mine, and I think he's going to re-furnish the house. And my—it wants it! It is a queer place inside! I never saw such a place. I should think there's nothing in it that wasn't made in the year one!"

Wedgwood saw that this young lady was of the sort that loves talk, and that he had only to smile and nod acquiescence to encourage her.

"Old-fashioned, eh?" he suggested.

"Old-fashioned! I should think so! Tumbling to pieces, I call it. But Aunt Janet's going to Manchester in a day or two—I'm going with her—and the whole place is going to be seen to by a firm of furnishing people there, and she's going to persuade Mr. Mortover to do everything properly—new furniture and new carpets and everything, and to have papering and painting done, so that it'll look like a gentleman's house. It's mouldy enough now, isn't it?"

"Bit out of repair, certainly," agreed Wedgwood. "Perhaps you'll persuade Mr. Mortover to buy a piano."

"Oh, well, I don't think he's musical," said the girl. "I've never heard of it—he never does anything but go out with his gun now and then on those moors. Still, while he's at it I think he might have a piano, don't you?"

"Oh, I should certainly have a piano, if I

were re-furnishing," said Wedgwood. "Oh, to be sure! Perhaps you'll be stopping here a while—you could play to him."

The girl gave him a look out of her eye-corners and began to pick bits of moss out of the wall against which they were standing.

"Oh, well," she answered ingenuously. "My aunt Janet, she wants me to marry Mr. Mortover. But I don't know. To be sure, I haven't got anybody at home; at least nobody serious. But I'm not sure that I should like living here—it's out of everything!"

"A piano and a motor-car would make a difference," remarked Wedgwood, archly. "They'd be a bit of compensation. But perhaps you're not in a hurry to change your name, eh?"

"Well, I don't know—I suppose one's got to, some time. There's three of us at home, besides me—we've all got to do something—pa's job in the City isn't such a grand one, and ma's always saying that us girls must do what we can for ourselves. I suppose—you said you used to live our way—I suppose you don't know pa?"

"Can't say that I do," replied Wedgwood. He held his sketch at arm's length, with his head on one side, studying the effect. "Might you know. What's his name?"

"Patello—Mr. Thomas Patello," replied the

girl. "He's in the sugar-broking in Mincing Lane——"

Before Wedgwood could reply that he hadn't the pleasure of Mr. Thomas Patello's acquaintance, a latticed window was opened in the front of the house, and the red and yellow handkerchiefed head of Janet Clagne thrust itself out.

"Mattie!" cried the housekeeper. "Come here—come at once—what're you doing, idling there, and all those fowls waiting to be fed?"

The girl made a grimace and hurried off; the red and yellow disappeared from the window. During the rest of the time that Wedgwood took to finish his sketch he saw no more of Mattie Patello, nor of young Mortover. But as he went away, glancing back at the house, he espied Janet Clagne watching him from a side-door; she was still watching when he turned the corner towards Netherwell. The detective was full of thought, surmise, speculation, tangled theories as he went back to the town. His prospecting of Mortover Grange had not been fruitless; he had learned things; he had seen young Philip Mortover: he had discovered his weird housekeeper. And from the lips of the artless Mattie Patello he had learned that Janet Clagne wanted to marry her penniless niece to her master, who was now likely to be a very wealthy man; he had learned, too, that

Janet Clagne had quite recently returned from a visit to London. Had all these things anything to do with the affair that he had in hand? Perhaps—but it needed a good deal of further work and disentanglement of hard knots before he could see exactly how. Also, Wedgwood had come to a point at which he wanted local help—that fact sent him, as soon as he had dined that evening, and when darkness had fallen, to the private house of the local superintendent of police.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CYCLOPÆDIA

Wedgwood took the local superintendent into his confidence. Sizing him up as a man of intelligence and discretion, he set forth the whole story of his investigations from the moment of his call to Miss Tandy's flat in Handel Street to the conclusion of his brief visit to Mortover Grange. And when he had made an end he put a direct question. Could the superintendent help him?

The superintendent, whose interest and curiosity had waxed mighty during the telling of the tale, shook his head almost sadly.

"The fact is," he answered, "I've only been here fifteen months. I came from quite another part of the county, and this neighbourhood was all strange to me. Of course, I've picked up a bit of knowledge since I came here. Got to know who people are and so on. And I've heard, to be sure, what everybody else has heard about this Mortover Grange business."

"And that's—what?" asked Wedgwood.

"Just the common gossip of the place. About this colliery they're starting there. That began

soon after I came. They say a gentleman who was staying at Buxton for his health was the first to suspect the presence of coal under that Mortover property: geologist, or something scientific, of that sort, he was. Then a Mr. Levigne came on the scene—he's stopped now and then at the 'Ram,' where you are, but sometimes he's stopped at Mortover Grange. Then boring operations began; they kept whatever news there was very quiet for a time, but it began to leak out that the results were highly gratifying. And then, of course, this company was started, and the talk here is that it's likely to do extra well—the local people are going in for shares, anyway."

"Do you know anything about this present Mortover?" enquired Wedgwood.

"Not much," replied the superintendent. "Lumpish, taciturn sort of chap, from what little I've seen of him. I see they've put him on the board of directors, but that must be because of his name—he's no head for business, scarcely educated, I should say—he's just grown up there as a colt might. Run loose!"

"And that housekeeper of his—Mrs. Clagne?"

The superintendent made a wry face.

"Queer woman, that!" he said. "I have had a bit to do with her. She's—well, under certain

circumstances, dangerous! One day this last summer a couple of men, out of works, tramps, in fact, went there to Mortover Grange when she was alone in the house. They asked for the master. She told them he wasn't in, and ordered them off the premises. Instead of going they hung about, waiting to see Mortover. What does this woman do but fetch a gun and shoot at 'em! Only just missed one of them, too—he'd pellets through his hat. Of course they came to me with a fine tale. I went out to see her about it and found her utterly defiant—she said she was a lone woman in a lonely house, she'd ordered these fellows away, and when they wouldn't go she'd a right to shoot at them. What was more, she told me point-blank that she cared for neither magistrates nor police—she'd take good care to protect herself. A determined party, she is—and, from what I could see, master there."

"Any relation to Mortover?" asked Wedgwood.

"That I can't say—know nothing about her except what I've told you."

"You don't know anything about the history of this Mortover family, I suppose?"

"I do not—except that I've heard it's been settled there on that property for hundreds of years. But I know who could tell you every-

thing about the Mortover family history and their estates, ever since there was either estates or Mortovers!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Wedgwood. "That's what I want! Who, now?"

"Mr. Charles Umpeltye! He's a solicitor in the town—the oldest solicitor. And he's an antiquary and an historian—all that sort of thing. Mad on it! They say he knows the history and pedigree of every family round here, from peers to peasants. Queer old chap, but quite easy to approach, especially if you want information on his favourite topics," said the superintendent. He glanced at the clock over his mantelpiece. "Take you round to see him now, if you like," he went on. "It's close by—that old house at the back of the parish church."

"By all means!" responded Wedgwood. "But—a moment! Is Mr. Umpeltye the sort I can speak to as freely as I've spoken to you?"

"Why, he's a solicitor," answered the superintendent, smiling. "You mean—has he got to the garrulous stage? Scarcely, I think. If I were you I should tell him all you've told me. He may be able to throw a bit of light on the subject."

Wedgwood replied that if Mr. Charles Umpeltye had the family history of the Mortovers at

his finger ends he would certainly be able to throw a great deal of light on one most important matter, and he readily followed the superintendent to an ancient mansion which stood in the shadow of the old church. He was beginning to feel pleased with the results of his labours; something he now felt assured was going to come of them. And he now had a conviction that it was not in London but here in this quiet, old-world town, that he was going to find a dependable clue to the solution of the mystery of John Wraypoole's murder.

Mr. Umpeltie, discovered in his study in the midst of a heterogeneous mass of books, antiques, pictures and curiosities, was a little, apple-cheeked, bright-eyed old gentleman who wore a black velvet skull-cap from the edges of which his silvery hair protruded in a crisply-curling mass. He was very old, but very much alive, and his air grew more alert and his eyes keener as soon as Wedgwood, re-telling his story, came to the mention of John Wraypoole's name.

"Wraypoole—that's a local name," said Mr. Umpeltie. "Ashlowe people they were—farmers—none of them left. Last of them were two boys, John, Thomas. Father and mother died when they were young, and they were taken to London. Never heard of them since."

"It's of John Wraypoole that I want to tell you, sir," continued Wedgwood. "And Thomas Wraypoole's name will come in. John Wraypoole was down here lately, Mr. Umpeltye; he stayed some days at the Ram Hotel."

"He never came to see me," said the old man. "I never heard of his being here, either. But tell me your tale."

Wedgwood went on, epitomizing his story. He soon discovered that Mr. Umpeltye however interested he was in matters of the past had precious little in affairs of the present—so little, indeed, that he had never heard of the Handel Street murder.

"I never read that sort of thing in the newspaper," he observed. "Indeed, I read the newspapers very little. So John Wraypoole has been murdered, eh? And—had his recent visit here any relation to his murder?"

Wedgwood replied that that was just what he wanted to find out, and went on with his details until he came to the visit to the police-station of Avice Mortover. The old man started.

"Avice—Avice Mortover!" he exclaimed. "Aye—Avice was always a favourite name for the Mortover women! A girl in London, earning her own living, and calling herself Avice Mortover, eh?" He gave the detective a searching look, and became even more deeply

attentive. "Go on!" he commanded. "Go on—to the end of it!"

Wedgwood went on—to the end of his brief call at Mortover Grange. Mr. Umpeltie remained silent for a minute or two. At last he looked up.

"You didn't mention this girl in London to Philip Mortover?" he asked sharply.

"Oh dear no, sir!" replied Wedgwood.

"Nor to his housekeeper—nor to the girl you saw there?"

"I have not mentioned her to anyone down here, sir," said the detective. "Except to you and to the superintendent."

Mr. Umpeltie produced a snuff-box, and after helping himself to a generous pinch, looked over the tops of his spectacles, first at the superintendent and then at the detective.

"Umph!" he said. "I shouldn't wonder if that girl in London is the daughter of Matthew Mortover! And if so——"

He paused, and taking another pinch of snuff made a second grunt which seemed to indicate a sort of surprised satisfaction, after which he muttered more to himself than to his guests:

"Aye, that's how it would be if it is so. If so, of course—but that is how it would be!"

He relapsed into silence, nodding at the leaping flames in the grate by which he sat,

and neither Wedgwood nor the superintendent broke in on his thoughts. Suddenly he twisted round on the detective.

"I shouldn't wonder if you've tumbled into a queer family romance, my friend!" he said, with a somewhat sardonic laugh. "If that girl in London calling herself Avice Mortover really is the daughter of Matthew Mortover, and if her father was the Matthew Mortover I am thinking of, she's the rightful owner of this Mortover property! What d'ye think of that, now?"

What Wedgwood thought was expressed by his silence. He suddenly saw a reason for John Wraypoole's murder! Mr. Umpeltie had indeed thrown light on that matter. And the old man was quick to note the detective's silence, and to understand it, and he chuckled as if amused.

"That gives you to think, eh, my friend!" he said. "Well, now you listen to me, and I'll tell you the recent history of the Mortover family. We'll begin at Gilson Mortover, grandfather of this present Philip Mortover. Gilson had two sons—the elder, Matthew; the younger, Stephen. When Matthew had grown to man's estate he didn't get on with his father, and eventually, after a violent quarrel with the old man, he left home. As far as I am aware he

has never been heard of by his family since then, nor by anybody else in these parts. If the story you've just told me is true, he is probably identical with the Matthew Mortover who went to Canada. You say that the girl in London reports her father as a man who never spoke of his relations, or his past? That, according to my recollection of him, is in strict keeping with Matthew Mortover's character as a young man: he was a reserved, morose, sullen sort of fellow. Most likely when he cut himself adrift from his family he meant to do it thoroughly—and, to be sure, there was at that time nothing for him to look forward to; the Mortovers were then, and until quite recently, as poor as crows! Well, as I say, Matthew disappeared; in course of time old Gilson died. And—he died intestate. Search was made high and low, but no will could be discovered—there is doubt that he ever made a will. Matthew was advertised for: there was no response. Eventually after some time Matthew's death was presumed, and Stephen took possession of the Mortover property. And now Stephen is dead and his son, the present Philip Mortover, is in possession. And—here is this girl! In all probability, from what you tell me, she's the daughter—and only child, you say—of Matthew Mortover, and Matthew himself has only been

dead a short time. So—there is a pretty legal situation for you! For, as I've said already, Gilson Mortover died intestate and his eldest son survived him many years."

"What's the legal position of this girl, sir—Avice Mortover?" asked Wedgwood.

"Assuming that her father was the Matthew Mortover of whom I've been talking," replied Mr. Umpeltie, "and that she is his legitimate and only child, and can prove all that, she has a strong, and I should say, unassailable claim to the Mortover property. When Gilson died intestate, Matthew, as eldest son, succeeded to that property—which is all real estate. Matthew never claimed it, it is true; it is true, also, that a claim can be barred by the Statute of Limitations through failure to prosecute a claim for a period of twelve years, but this time does not begin to run against a claimant when he is beyond the seas until he returns home, nor against an infant until he or she attains the age of twenty-one years. Therefore, the position is this, as I see it—as Gilson died intestate, the property passed to Matthew. Matthew being alive it was never Stephen's. Stephen being dead it is not Philip's. It is this girl's—Matthew's daughter. That is, if her story is true, and if she can give full proof of all she alleges."

“What ought she to do, sir?” asked Wedgwood.

The old lawyer took another pinch of snuff.

“Obvious!” he answered with a grunt. “Put her case in the hands of a respectable firm of solicitors!”

Wedgwood and the superintendent presently went away. Outside, the superintendent laughed.

“Clever, shrewd old chap, isn’t he?” he said admiringly. “Do you know what they call him hereabouts? They call him the Cyclopædia! Knows everything, what?”

“He’s thrown a good deal of light on my business!” remarked Wedgwood. He lowered his voice to a whisper. “Between you and me,” he went on, “it’s my opinion now that John Wraypoole was murdered because of his knowledge of this affair! He’d unearthed all the facts and had them set out in that manuscript labelled *Mortover* that I told you of. What do you think?”

“Precisely what I should think—from what you’ve told me,” agreed the superintendent.

“Well—the thing now, I suppose is who did it?”

“That,” said Wedgwood, “will take a lot of finding out!”

Still, he thought, as he turned into his hotel

a little later, he had made a good beginning. He had learned a lot and discovered much since arriving at Netherwell. And as luck would have it he suddenly discovered more. Entering the smoking-room for a final pipe and a night-cap, he found men who were discussing the Handel Street Murder.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CONFECTIONER'S SHOP

The two men upon whose conversation Wedgwood chanced were apparently of the farmer class; they sat in a corner near the hearth, smoking and drinking, obviously enjoying half an hour's ease before going homeward. A newspaper lay on the table in front of them, and one was pointing the stem of his pipe to a passage in it as Wedgwood passed to a chair close by.

"Never said anything in these paper accounts, so far—at least, as far as I've seen—about this John Wraypoole being a native of our parts," said this man. "I've expected that, but there's been nothing about it up to now. Come out later very like. But of course he was—he was an Ashlowe man, and though him and his brother Thomas—I mind 'em well when we were all lads together—went away when they were youngsters, John was down here and stopping in this very house not so long ago. I had speech with him."

"You had, eh?" said the other.

"I had so! He came over to Ashlowe once

or twice, and I recognized him—at least I thought I did, and I made bold to ask him if he wasn't John Wraypoole that I'd known many a year ago. He admitted it, and we had a glass or two together, but he told me that he didn't want it noised abroad that he was here—at least, who he was. He was down here, he said, on a bit of private and important business, of a very confidential nature. So of course I said nothing to anybody."

"To be sure!" assented the other. "Just so! And of course he wouldn't tell you what the business was?"

"He didn't—but I heard later that he'd spent a good bit of time examining the parish registers at Ashlowe—went to the parson about 'em, of course. No, he gave me no idea of what you might call the exact nature of his business. But I saw him again, here in Netherwell before he went away, though not to speak to. He was talking to that woman that keeps house for young Mortover."

"Janet Clagne, eh?"

"The same! I saw him and her—it was market-day—standing talking together outside Chipchase's confectioner's shop in the Horse-fair—they had their heads close together—same as if they were discussing something of importance. And I was thinking of going up

to him when he'd finished with her and having a bit more talk with him, when they both disappeared into Chipchase's shop—there's a refreshment room there, you know, where folks can get tea and such like, and I made out that they were going to continue their talk in it. So I went my ways and I saw no more of him. And as I reckon things up this murder must ha' taken place very nigh as soon as Wraypoole got back to London. It was certainly within two or three days o' my seeing him with that woman."

"What could he be wanting with her, now?" asked the second man. "Old friends, maybe?"

"Why, her family's been in these parts a good while," answered the first speaker. "Comes from beyond Ashlowe Ridge, she does. Queer woman, too! Had her own way yonder at Mortover Grange."

"They say that there'll be some rare changes there, now that this coal-mine's to be started. Young Philip'll be rolling in money! And by all accounts money's been scarce enough with these Mortovers up to now!"

"Poor as church mice! I've known three generations of 'em—they never had naught, none of 'em. Poor and proud! And it's all very well talking about young Philip coming in for so much over this colliery, but there's been

a man behind him that'll have to be reckoned with—that London chap that's come here now and then. They say he's found all the money that's been wanted for this boring. And of course he'll want it back first go-off."

"Still, young Philip will be a wealthy man, I reckon! The land was his when all's said and done."

The man who had done most of the talking picked up his glass and drank off its remaining contents.

"Aye, well!" he observed as he set the glass down with an emphatic gesture. "That's as may be! There's some of us about here that could say a word or two about that, you know. In his possession, right! And in possession of his father before him, right! And possession as the saying goes is nine points of the law. But most folks of these parts knows well enough that old Gilson Mortover, grandfather of this Philip never made a will—at least, no will was ever discovered—and they know, too, that he had an elder son, Matthew, who went away and never came back. Now suppose Matthew turned up—he'd be an oldish man, yet not so old as all that—or that a son of his turned up? What then?"

The other man shook his head.

"Awk'ard situation that would be, I reckon!"

he said. "Very awk'ard—for this young Philip!"

"I reckon!" agreed the first speaker. "It would—so far as I can see. Well? I'm for home!"

The two men stumped out and Wedgwood, who had affected to read a newspaper while he listened threw it aside, and lighting his pipe proceeded to think over the information acquired from their gossip. So Wraypoole had been in touch with Janet Clagne, had he? About what? Had he told her of the existence of Avice Mortover, and of her claim to be Matthew Mortover's only surviving child? Impossible to answer those questions, of course! Nobody could answer them but John Wraypoole and Janet Clagne—and he was dead and she . . . one might as well expect an answer from the Sphinx as a reply from her—unless she was pleased to give it.

But Wedgwood was determined to know more of that interview, and next morning after breakfast he walked round to the street called Horsefair and sought for Mrs. Chipchase's shop. That was soon found—an old-fashioned place, the bow-window of which was filled with cakes and pastries; through its brightly-polished panes he saw a smart, alert-looking woman busied behind a counter. And having

already made up his mind as to what he was going to do, Wedgwood went in and ascertaining that the woman was Mrs. Chipchase, asked her for a private interview on business.

Mrs. Chipchase, somewhat surprised, ushered her visitor into a tea-parlour at the back of the shop; Wedgwood examined it with interest as the scene of Wraypoole's talk with the queer woman of Mortover Grange. It was just the sort of place for a secret conference—quiet, dark, shut off. He turned to the confectioner who was regarding him with a wondering enquiry.

"You don't know me, of course, ma'am," he said politely. "I'll tell you who I am and why I'm here in a minute—in strict confidence. But first of all I daresay you've read in the newspapers about a certain affair in London which has come to be known as the Handel Street murder? I thought you would!" he added, as Mrs. Chipchase nodded assent. "Well, ma'am, I'm the detective officer—Detective-Sergeant Wedgwood—in charge of the investigations relating to that case. I've come here as a result of those investigations, and I think you can tell me something."

Mrs. Chipchase stared at him in amazement.

"Lor' bless you, mister!" she exclaimed

incredulously. "What can I tell you? I've never been in London in my life!"

"Never mind London!" said Wedgwood with a smile. "We may have to take in China or Peru or both before we've done! However, you know that the name of the murdered man is John Wraypoole. Now, did you ever know him?"

"No, sir!" replied Mrs. Chipchase. "That I'm sure of!"

"All the same," continued Wedgwood, "Wraypoole has been in your shop, and in this room not so long ago! Now listen—and bear in mind, Mrs. Chipchase, that all this is strictly private and confidential between you and me. Do you know a woman named Janet Clagne?"

"Mrs. Clagne of Mortover Grange?" replied the confectioner. "Why, of course! Everybody knows Mrs. Clagne round here!"

"Very well—now we can sail ahead! Do you remember Mrs. Clagne coming in here one market-day afternoon, quite recently, with a gentleman?"

"Yes, certainly I do. About ten days or a fortnight ago. Oh, yes, I remember that well enough. I'd noticed them talking together outside my window, for some little time before they came in. It began to rain so they turned

in here. A tallish, quiet-looking, grey-haired man he was."

"Exactly, ma'am. Very well—that was John Wraypoole about whose murder you've read!"

Mrs. Chipchase gasped.

"You don't say!" she exclaimed. "And such a nice, polite man! Well, I never! And I suppose Mrs. Clagne knows all about it, mister?"

It was on the tip of the detective's tongue to answer that he'd give a good deal to know positively what Mrs. Clagne did know about it. But he shook his head.

"I haven't spoken to Mrs. Clagne in reference to the matter," he replied. "And I don't want you to say anything to Mrs. Clagne, or to tell anyone that I've mentioned it to you. What I want you to tell me is just this—those two came in here didn't they? Very well—how long did they stop?"

"The better part of an hour, mister. They had tea—and muffins—at that table in the corner there. I served it to them myself. I came in once again a bit later to bring hot water, and I noticed they seemed to be in very particular talk."

"You didn't overhear anything that was said?"

Mrs. Chipchase reflected awhile, fingering the corner of her white apron.

"Well," she replied at last, "I did just catch a word or two. But it wasn't anything that was said while they were in here—it was something the gentleman was saying as they passed through the shop when they were leaving."

"And what was that?" enquired Wedgwood.

"Well, of course, I didn't understand it," answered the confectioner. "But I've a good memory, and I can remember the exact words. He said 'Russell Square Tube, then, at six o'clock.' Just that and no more."

"Did she make any reply?"

"No—not that I heard. They were close to the door then; in fact he was opening it. I watched them after they got outside; they talked a minute or so; then he went one way and she went another."

Wedgwood turned to go; once more he had been fortunate in getting information; his next job was to think out some plan of acting on the information so far obtained.

"I'm obliged to you, ma'am," he said. "You'll remember that all this is in strict confidence. Parted outside, did they? Of course, that would be the last you saw of them?"

"Why, it was the last I saw of them together," replied Mrs. Chipchase. "I saw Mrs.

Clagne again early next morning. Fact is she came in here by herself. It was a pouring wet day, that—she came in here in an old horse-man's cape dripping with rain, and told me that she'd walked in from Mortover on her way to the station to catch a train to London—might she leave the cape with me? I have it now—she's not called for it yet."

"That was the next day, was it?" asked Wedgwood.

"The very next morning!" assented Mrs. Chipchase.

Wedgwood went away pondering deeply over this last bit of information. Assuredly, he thought, he was getting at something. Wraypoole and Janet Clagne had a long conversation in Mrs. Chipchase's tea-room one afternoon. On parting he was heard to say "Russell Square Tube, then, at six o'clock." Next morning Janet Clagne went by an early train to London. Now arose questions. Did Wraypoole precede her? Did he return to London as soon as he had had that interview with her at the confectioner's shop? Was it he and she who were to meet at the Russell Square Tube station at six o'clock? If so was that meeting on the evening of Wraypoole's murder?

He went slowly back to his hotel and turned into the smoking-room—to do more thinking.

And there at the counter, chatting familiarly with the barmaid was a stranger, a somewhat over-dressed, loud-voiced person, of a type suggestive of a certain sort of City man, who was sipping a glass of sherry and puffing a big, strong-smelling cigar. He glanced carelessly at the detective as he entered, then more closely, finished his sherry and with a nod to the girl went out, and crossing the hall vanished into a room on the other side, the door of which Wedgwood noticed had, since morning, been furnished with a printed label—*Private*.

The barmaid glanced at Wedgwood with a knowing smile.

“That’s Mr. Levigne!” she announced with importance. “The gentleman that’s all to do with this new colliery. A great London gentleman he is. Down here for a few days again—he always has a private sitting-room when he comes.”

“Oh!” said Wedgwood. “Indeed! Great man, no doubt!”

He sat awhile, thinking, and watching the door on the opposite side of the hall—Levigne, in walking out, had left the smoking-room door wide open. And Wedgwood did not watch unprofitably. Before many minutes had elapsed Janet Clagne, evidently attired in her best, walked sharply into the hotel, and, as if know-

ing her way about well enough, knocked at and immediately entered the door of Levigne's private sitting-room. The door closed on her angular figure. . . .

Wedgwood had only just seen this when the hall-porter came into the smoking-room.

"Mr. Wedgwood?" he said enquiringly.
"Telegram for you, sir—just come."

CHAPTER TEN

THE LOST MANUSCRIPT

Within a moment of its reception Wedgwood had read the contents of the telegram and was hastening upstairs to pack his bag; in less than ten minutes he had paid his bill and was hurrying away from the hotel to the station. For the telegraphic message which, as he had expected before opening it, was from the inspector at Hunter Street, was peremptory—*Return at once highly important news.*

Wedgwood was lucky in catching a local train that was just starting for Derby, and in getting at Derby an immediate connection for London: by two o'clock of the afternoon he walked into the police-station, wondering what tidings awaited him. He was not kept in suspense; the inspector, taking him aside, uttered four words without preface.

“That manuscript’s turned up!”

Wedgwood set down his belongings and gaped his astonishment. This was the last news he had expected to hear. That anybody should deliberately murder a man in order to

gain possession of a manuscript and should then lose that manuscript seemed absurd.

"Good lord!" he exclaimed, feebly. "You don't say so!"

The inspector unlocked a drawer and produced a crumpled and mud-stained roll of crown paper. Flattening it out and spreading it on his desk he pointed significantly to a label on the front.

"There you are," he said. "See that? *Mortover!*"

Wedgwood drew near and peered nervously at the unexpected find. It looked to him as if the manuscript had undergone rough treatment: it appeared, indeed, to have been not only dropped in the mud of the street but to have been run over by the wheel of some vehicle.

"How did it come into your hands?" he asked. "And when?"

"This morning—not ten minutes before I wired to you," answered the inspector. "A man came in here—I've got his name and address and he lives close by—and told me that he picked this up one night at the corner of Handel Street and Wakefield Street. He was a bit uncertain about the night, but after questioning him awhile I came to the conclusion that it was the evening of the murder. He was certain, however, about the time—just after

seven—and gave me proof of his certainty. Seems to me that Wraypoole's assailant, after knocking him down in Miss Tandy's flat and seizing the manuscript, scuttled off in the Gray's Inn Road direction and dropped his loot! That's about it. For there's no doubt this is the manuscript Miss Tandy described to us."

"Have you examined it?" asked Wedgwood.

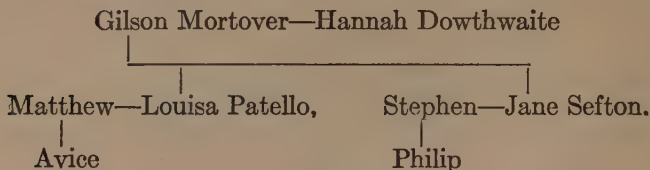
"Read it clean through! It's a sort of family history of recent generations of the Mortovers, tracing a descent down—in the eldest son line—to that girl who came to see you, Avice Mortover. A pretty straightforward narrative, I should say—but there are blanks left here and there. And there's a pedigree—sort of family tree business."

"Let's look," said Wedgwood. He opened the mud-stained cover and began to glance over the written contents. With much of what John Wraypoole had written the detective was already familiar, either through his own investigations or because of his conversation with Mr. Umpeltie. But when he came to the pedigree of which the inspector had spoken he let out a sudden exclamation.

"By George!" he said. "Look at that! Now that is something I didn't know and that'll come in uncommonly useful! See?"

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He pointed to the last few lines of the Mortover pedigree:



“That is worth something—to me!” he repeated. “Splendid link in the chain!”

“I don’t follow,” said the inspector. “You know more, of course. What is it?”

“That entry about Matthew! Married one Louisa Patello! Now, there’s a girl of that name, Patello—uncommon name, too, that—now staying at Mortover Grange. But of course you don’t know what I’ve done, seen, heard down there. We’d better go into that at once.”

He spent the next hour in detailing his discoveries and experiences to the inspector, from his arrival at Netherwell to his departure from it, and at the end put a direct question to him.

“What do you make of it?”

“I make this of it, Wedgwood,” replied his companion promptly. “Wraypoole found out that the real owner of that Mortover property is this girl Avice, Matthew’s daughter. Somebody found out that he knew, and that he’d put his grounds in this manuscript, which, in all

probability, he was going to hand to some solicitors on behalf of the girl. That somebody also knew, or believed, that nobody but Wraypoole was aware of the secret, and accordingly followed him that evening when he went to Miss Tandy's and seized the opportunity of her absence to knock him over and seize this thing. I make no doubt that's the true theory! The only question is—who's the somebody?"

"Stiff proposition!" muttered Wedgwood. "Seen that all along—see it more than ever now that I know all I do!"

"Well, who'd suffer if this girl's claim to the property was established?" said the inspector.

"This present holder of it—her cousin Philip!"

"I think we can rule him out of any list of likely murderers!" replied Wedgwood. "I can't see him in that light—no!"

"Well, there are other folks concerned," continued the inspector. "People mixed up with him in this colliery business. There's Levigne—you wanted to know something about him. I've made some enquiries. He's a man whose name is not unknown to us. Never been in actual trouble, but he was mixed up some little time ago in some very doubtful company—promoting transactions which were brought under notice at headquarters. Now, if Levigne's got a big stake in this colliery

project, he'd not welcome any claim being laid to the Mortover Estate. Levigne'll have to be watched, and his connection with the whole affair investigated. You say that when you left Netherwell this morning he was closeted with young Mortover's housekeeper, who seems to be a queer sort of person, according to your account—do you make anything of that?"

Wedgwood made a gesture which signified that he made a good deal but that he was also up against a barrier.

"That woman licks me!" he exclaimed. "I feel certain she's the motive power behind this business, but"—he shook his head and remained silent awhile—"the fact is," he went on, after evidently thinking things over. "I've a strong suspicion that if Wraypoole did let out the result of his enquiries about Avice Mortover to anybody it was to this woman—Janet Clagne! Why did he talk, evidently in confidence, with her for a good hour in Mrs. Chipchase's tea-room the last afternoon he was at Netherwell? And what was the meaning of the words Mrs. Chipchase overheard—'Russell Square Tube, then, six o'clock'? It strikes me the solution of the whole mystery may be in that! The Tube station for Russell Square is in Bernard Street and Bernard Street and Handel Street are not far apart!"

"It looks like an appointment for a meeting," remarked the inspector. "Of course, it was that! But—when, and with whom? Was it with this Janet Clagne? Or was it between Janet Clagne and somebody else?"

"Wraypoole left Netherwell within an hour or two of his talk with Janet Clagne at the tea-room," said Wedgwood. "Janet Clagne went up to London first thing next morning."

"Then in all probability what he was referring to was a meeting between them," remarked the inspector. "If you could only trace her movements after she arrived in London?"

"I might do something in that way," assented Wedgwood. "The girl I've mentioned to you as now being at Mortover Grange, Mattie Patello, told me that she had come there with her aunt, Mrs. Clagne, who had been visiting her people at Tooting. I can find out where the family lives at Tooting—the father's a sugar-broker in business in the City, in Mincing Lane."

"Good deal to work on, with all these details to begin with," said the inspector. "By the by, didn't you say that this girl, Mattie Patello, told you that her people wanted her to marry Philip Mortover?"

"She did! At least, that her aunt did. What of it?"

"What her aunt wished in that way, the girl's mother probably wished, too!" suggested the inspector with a sly laugh. "This young Mortover's a highly eligible party, of course. I should say the two women had been putting their heads together during Mrs. Clagne's visit. Anyway, I think you'd better have a look at that Patello family."

"I'll have a look at them!" said Wedgwood. He sat alertly considering things for awhile. "I wish," he suddenly exclaimed, "I wish I could get more evidence about Thomas Wraypoole's doings on the evening of John's murder! I've always felt that he wasn't telling the truth. I believe he did see his brother—did meet him!"

"Why?" asked the inspector.

"Can't say! Intuition, if you like—or, if you like, mere fancy. But I do believe it—I believe they met. I believe Thomas Wraypoole knows a lot more than he's let out! I've never got over the fact that he went straight to John's lodgings in Porteous Road first thing next morning, and there burned a quantity of John's papers. Now, supposing those papers related to this Avice Mortover?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the inspector. "That would certainly look fishy!"

“Well, he did burn papers! I myself saw a grate full of the ashes. Now suppose—it’s not beyond the bounds of probability—that Thomas had reasons, financial reasons, against this girl’s claim to the Mortover property being set up and substantiated? Eh?”

The inspector regarded his companion with a long, steady look.

“Um!” he said at last. “Getting to the idea that Thomas may be in the same box with some more of them—Mrs. Clagne and the rest? That it?”

“As I say—not beyond the bounds of probability! Why did Thomas Wraypoole make such indecent haste to Porteous Road? Why did he proceed to burn papers and documents as soon as he got there? He could have carried them away. He could have sealed them up. But—he burned them! What were they?”

“Do you know whether that girl, Avise Mortover, ever confided any documents to John Wraypoole?” asked the inspector. “Did she mention such a thing?”

“She did not!” replied Wedgwood. “But I’m going off to see her—now. I know where to find her—refreshment room, British Museum. She may be able to tell me a bit more. And after that I shall turn my attention to this

Patello family and try to trace Janet Clagne's movements while she was in town."

"Not have much difficulty in finding that family, I should say, with a name like that!" remarked the inspector. "But I reckon you'll have to walk warily in approaching them! If this woman at Mortover Grange is Mrs. Patello's sister, and the two of 'em want to marry that girl you saw to young Mortover, they'll be pretty cute, you know!"

"Leave it to me," said Wedgwood. "I've a good excuse for making a call on them."

He went off to another part of the office to consult the Directory, and, as he had anticipated, found no difficulty in locating the Patello address in Tooting—Number 59 Acacia Terrace. Making a note of it in his book he set off for the British Museum. But as he stepped out of the police-station Miss Tandy came along the street, going in the direction of her flat, and Wedgwood went up to and stopped her.

"Come inside a minute or two, Miss Tandy," he said. "We've something here that I'd like you to see."

Miss Tandy, staring wonderingly at her surroundings, followed the detective to the room in which Wedgwood had left the inspector; the inspector seeing her was quick to realize Wedgwood's reason for bringing her there, and

without a word unlocked his drawer and produced the manuscript.

"There!" said Wedgwood, drawing Miss Tandy's attention to it. "Look at that, ma'am. Is that the manuscript Wraypoole brought you to copy?"

Miss Tandy uttered a gentle shriek of astonishment.

"Gracious me!" she exclaimed. "That's it, of course! But it was clean as a new pin when he laid it on my desk! Whatever's happened to it? And where did you get it?"

"Picked up in the street, Miss Tandy, and not so far from your door," said the inspector. "But—you're to keep that to yourself, you know! Strict silence!"

"You can swear to it if need be?" suggested Wedgwood. "No doubt about it?"

"No doubt whatever!" declared Miss Tandy. "I'll swear to it!"

Wedgwood escorted Miss Tandy forth again, and after assuring her that he was making some progress went on to the British Museum. The afternoon was wearing to an end, and he supposed that Avise Mortover's duties in the refreshment room would be nearly over. He had already made his plans—he would take her off to some quiet place where, over a cup of tea, he could cautiously tell her what he had dis-

covered, and discuss with her what could be done. But when he walked into the room in which he expected to find her, he looked for her in vain, and eventually failing to locate her he approached the manageress.

"I can't say where Avice Mortover is," said that lady, somewhat sharply. "She has not been here for the last few days, and she's sent no explanation of her absence."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MISSING!

Unemotional though he was by nature, and used to sudden surprises by reason of his professional work, Wedgwood experienced a sense of unusual astonishment on hearing this piece of news. He had confidently counted on finding Avice Mortover at her post; the announcement just made took him unawares and threw him off his well-mapped course.

"Perhaps she's ill?" he suggested, lamely.

"It was her duty to send me word in that case," replied the manageress. "I've had no word. She was well enough when she left here night before last." She paused, scrutinizing Wedgwood more closely. "Are you some relative?" she asked.

"No," answered Wedgwood. "I want to see her on business. Important business—legal business. Relating to her private affairs."

"Well, you're not the first to come enquiring for her," said the manageress. "There's been a young gentleman here asking after her twice to-day, and apparently very anxious to find her. I don't know who he is, but one of the other

waitresses says she's seen him here now and then talking to Avice Mortover, and once she saw him waiting outside for her when the staff left—saw her join him, in fact."

"Do you know her private address?" asked Wedgwood.

"I do—but I don't know that I ought to give it," replied the manageress. "I've just written to her there asking why she hasn't been to her work. If you call here to-morrow afternoon—"

"No," interrupted Wedgwood, firmly. "Sorry, but my business is urgent." He laid his professional card before the manageress. "You see who I am, and what," he went on. "I'm investigating some business which concerns Miss Mortover——"

"Nothing against her, I hope!" said the manageress. "Nothing——"

"No—no!" protested Wedgwood. "It's in relation to some property to which she has a claim. It's necessary that I should see her at once, and if you give me her address, of course——"

"Oh, well!" said the manageress. "It's 350 Mornington Crescent. But I shouldn't have given it if you hadn't told me who you were."

"Did you give it to the young man you mentioned?" enquired Wedgwood.

"He never asked for it! I shouldn't have

given it to him, either. I suppose you'll go there now?"

"At once!" answered Wedgwood.

"Then you might tell her to let me hear from her," said the manageress. "Of course, if she's not well, it can't be helped. But we're short-handed."

Within half an hour Wedgwood was knocking at the door of 350 Mornington Crescent. It was now after dusk, but he could see enough of the house to recognize a typical lodging and boarding establishment of those parts, of the shabby-genteel, seen-better-days order, and he was not surprised when a faded, careworn-looking woman opened the door to him.

"Miss Mortover at home?" enquired Wedgwood. "Miss Avice Mortover?"

Instead of replying the woman held the door open more widely, motioning him to enter. She closed it when he had stepped in, and still preserving silence ushered him into a front parlour and turned up a solitary gas jet.

"Is it some relation of Miss Mortover's?" she asked, eyeing the detective timidly.

"No!" replied Wedgwood. "But Miss Mortover knows me. I want to see her on business."

The woman shook her head in a fashion that denoted perplexity.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what to say—

it's none of my fault that I can see!" she answered after a pause. "But the fact is, I don't know where Miss Mortover may be! She's not been here since night before last! She went out then, and she's never come back nor sent me any word. I don't know what to do about it. There's been a young gentleman here twice to-day—a young fellow that says he's paying his addresses to her, though I'm sure I never heard of it before, and the last time he called he said I ought to acquaint the police, and that if she wasn't back by the next time he called, to-night, he should do so himself. But I don't like going to the police——"

"Look here, ma'am," broke in Wedgwood. "I may as well tell you I'm a police-officer. Detective-Sergeant Wedgwood. I'm investigating something—legal business we'll call it—in which Miss Mortover is concerned, and I want to see her about it. I've been to the refreshment room at the British Museum——"

"The young man said he'd been there, too," interrupted the landlady.

"Just so! Miss Mortover hasn't been there for two days. Well, now, you say she went away from here night before last? Under what circumstances? Let me know all you can tell me!"

"Well, I don't know that the circumstances

were in any way unusual! Miss Mortover came in about her usual time that evening and had her tea. She didn't say anything to me about going out again, and she seemed in her usual spirits. I don't think she had any intention of going out, because after her tea she got out some sewing and started work on it. But about seven o'clock a lady came to the door and asked for Miss Mortover——"

"Stop a bit!" broke in Wedgwood. "A lady? Did you see her?"

"I opened the door to her myself, and showed her in here—to this room."

"Then you can describe her?"

The landlady hesitated.

"Well, not very well, for she was that heavily veiled and wrapped up about her neck and shoulders that I couldn't see her face—to be sure of it, anyway. She was a tall, spare woman, and I thought from the country. She didn't speak like a Londoner—I've heard people from the North speak like that."

"How was she dressed?" enquired Wedgwood.

"She'd a heavy fur coat that came down to her ankles, and a good deal of wrap about her neck, and a dark veil—well dressed I should say. And as far as I could judge a middle-aged person."

"Well—she asked for Miss Mortover, did she? Give any name herself?"

"No—she didn't. And I never thought to ask her for one. Miss Mortover was in my sitting-room; she used to sit with me of an evening. I went and told her of this lady, and she came up here at once."

"Did Miss Mortover seem to expect her?"

"Oh, dear me, no! I'm sure she didn't. She remarked as she went out that she wondered who it could be?"

"Did you overhear any conversation between them?"

"Oh, no! This door was shut, of course—besides, my sitting-room is downstairs. No, I heard nothing—at least, no talk. They were in this room some time—half an hour, I should think. Then I heard Miss Mortover go upstairs to her own room. She was there some little time; then she came down again. A minute or two later I heard them go out of the front door. And since then—in fact, since the moment in which she left my sitting-room to come up to the visitor in this parlour—I've neither set eyes on Miss Mortover nor heard a word from her!"

"She's not the sort of young woman you'd expect to be inconsiderate, I suppose?" asked Wedgwood.

“Anything but! She’s always been a most considerate girl to me. That’s why I’m afraid there’s something wrong. I’m sure that if she’d had any idea of going away for the night she’d have told me. But she went away with this woman without saying a word—and that makes me feel certain that when she left the house it was with the intention of being back again very soon. I never knew her go out at any time before without telling me when——”

At this junction the landlady was interrupted by a loud knock on her front door. She turned to the detective with a look of significant intelligence.

“That’ll be the young man I mentioned,” she murmured. “He said he’d come back about this time.”

“Bring him in here,” suggested Wedgwood. “Let me have a word with him.”

The landlady went out and after a whispered conversation with her caller in the hall came back, ushering in a young man whom Wedgwood recognized at first glance as a person of character—probably of a somewhat odd and eccentric character. He was a thick-set, sturdily-built fellow, plain of feature, with a snub nose, and innumerable freckles, no beauty in any way, but possessed of a pair of singularly steady and honest eyes which he at once fixed

on the detective in a searching, continued gaze. For the rest of him he was attired in a fashionable and expensive suit of rather loud, check tweed, he had a briar pipe between his teeth and a formidable ash-plant stick under his left armpit, and his hands were plunged in the pockets of his trousers. And at his heels, as if it were the shadow of himself, walked an Airedale terrier.

"This gentleman's come to ask about her," the landlady was saying as she came into the room, indicating the detective. "Of course I can't tell either of you anything—I know nothing!"

The young man still examining Wedgwood with steady scrutiny, took his pipe out of his mouth and addressed him.

"Who may you be?" he demanded curtly.

"I might put the same question to you!" returned Wedgwood with a smile. "But I won't! I understand you're the young gentleman who's been enquiring here and at the British Museum for Miss Mortover and that you knew her pretty well. Now instead of asking you the question you asked me I'll ask another: 'Have you been in Miss Mortover's confidence?'"

"I was—until this happened," answered the young man. "Thought so, anyhow!"

“Did Miss Mortover ever tell you that she went to Hunter Street police-station last week, and saw a detective-officer there?”

“She did—Wedgwood!”

“Very well, I’m Wedgwood. No doubt Miss Mortover told you all about why she called to see me—about the Wraypoole affair. Since then I’ve discovered a good deal, and I came here, after calling at the British Museum, to see her about things. And—she’s gone!”

The young man had replaced his pipe in his mouth and was steadily drawing at it. He remained silent for a moment; then he suddenly turned to the landlady, nodding his head at the door.

“Just let me and Mr. Wedgwood have a bit of private talk, mistress,” he said. “See that no one interrupts—I’ll make it all right with you.”

The landlady vanished and the newcomer, pointing the detective to a chair at the side of the table, perched himself close by on the table’s edge. Wedgwood, watching the pair with something of amused interest, noticed that wherever the master moved the Airedale terrier moved also.

“Look here, Wedgwood!” began this unusual person. “Straight talk! My name’s Nottidge, James Nottidge. If you want to

know who I am go ask anybody up Belsize Park—I've a house of my own there and I'm a man of substance as my old dad was before me; he left me a rich man, and I know as well how to take care of what I have as this bit of dog-flesh knows how to take care of me—if need be! Now, I'm a man of leisure, d'ye see, and I spend a lot of my time educating myself by visiting museums, picture-galleries, and what not—I've a taste that way. I've gone a great deal to the British Museum of late, and I met this girl in the refreshment room and took a liking to her—honest! And I've seen her home from there, and taken her out a bit, and to cut it short we got engaged the other night, and now—now this damned business has cropped up! And what I say, Wedgwood is—what d'ye make of it?"

Wedgwood gave his companion a keen look.

"You're deeply concerned about it, Mr. Nottidge?" he said.

"Never slept a wink last night, Wedgwood! Look here—I've got to find that girl! If you know anything——"

"I'll tell you what I do know!" exclaimed Wedgwood, with a sudden making-up of his mind. "We're in the same boat! You want to find this girl—so do I! She must be found.

. . . Now listen and I'll put it as briefly as I can."

He went on to summarize the result of his investigations, and Nottidge sat silent, watching him intently. The detective noticed that the pipe went out, but its owner kept the stem between his teeth, biting hard on it. . . .

"So—there it is, Mr. Nottidge!" concluded Wedgwood, spreading his hands as he made an end of his story. "Now you know as much as I do! And I'm bound to say that it looks to me as if there's been—I don't like to say or think foul play, but some concerted action on the part of the people—person, perhaps, or persons—who got rid of Wraypoole to get hold of Miss Mortover. My opinion is that the woman who called on her here night before last lured her off somewhere on some very plausible pretext, and that she's detained against her will."

Nottidge got off the table and began to button his coat.

"What can you do about it?" he asked in a tense voice.

"We can start—and we will start—what used to be called the hue-and-cry for her," replied Wedgwood. "Notify her as missing, you know."

“Advertising—is that any good?” asked Nottidge.

“Publicity’s an excellent thing,” said Wedgwood. “I shall do what I can in that way. And if you want to help you can do something yourself now. Slip down to Fleet Street, call in at the principal newspaper offices and give them information. That might do a lot of good. Publicity, you know——”

Before he could say more Nottidge had seized and violently shaken his hand, chirruped to the dog, and was out of the room and the house; Wedgwood heard him running fast along the street.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MR. PATELLO

For a moment the detective stood staring at the door through which Nottidge had vanished. Then he laughed softly.

"That chap's in love!" he murmured. "He means business! Well——"

Going out into the hall he rapped on the panelling at the head of the stair; the landlady put her head out of a door at its foot.

"He's gone, ma'am," said Wedgwood. "Just a word with you before I go. If Miss Mortover should return here," he went on as the woman rejoined him, "you must communicate with me—here's my card—at once."

"I'm sure I should be very glad to see her back!" said the landlady. "It would relieve me of a deal of anxiety. You don't know into whose hands she may have fallen—a quiet, well-behaved girl like that!"

"Nice girl, is she?" suggested Wedgwood.

"One of the nicest, mister!" affirmed the landlady. "I never saw anything but the nicest disposition in her!"

"Well, we'll do our best to find her," said

Wedgwood as he made for the door. "And so, I'm sure, will that young fellow who's just been. Don't forget, now, to let me know at once if you hear anything."

He went out into the night wondering what to do next, and speculating on the reason of Avice Mortover's sudden disappearance. That she had been inveigled away was certain—but who was the woman? Not Janet Clagne—for Janet Clagne three nights ago was in Derbyshire. But Janet Clagne had a sister here in London—Mrs. Patello. Was it possible that Mrs. Patello was the tall, spare woman, heavily veiled, in whose company Avice Mortover had left her lodgings? Possible, of course—and the possibility presently put Wedgwood into a taxicab and sent him hurrying away to that London suburb called Tooting.

Acacia Terrace, Tooting, proved to be one of those suburban thoroughfares of which outer London can boast its hundreds—a street of small houses built to a pattern, and every one so like its fellow that neither can be distinguished save by name or number. It is the ambition—or seems to be the aim—of all the dwellers in these houses to carry uniformity to the extremest degree. The little front gardens are all alike; the blinds are all alike; the curtains are all alike; the inserted glass panels

in the front doors seem to have been cut out of one sheet; the doors and wood-work are all painted the same colour: any resident in such a street might well be excused if he were found entering the house of a neighbour under the impression that its threshold was his own. And if the inquisitive could penetrate behind the cheap lace curtains—between which, in every case, a pensive aspidistra lifts its leaves from a pot placed on an antimacassared table—he would find that all the front parlours are alike; small, four-square tanks in which a suite of cheap but showy furniture is stiffly disposed against the walls, and the mantelpiece is crowded with ornaments which he will itch to break and family photographs that show how ill-favoured most folk are, and wherein there is an atmosphere, impossible to describe but speedily assertive, which is a sure proof that this, the *Sanctum Sanctorum* of the establishment is like a lot of other truly British things, only for use on Sunday.

It was in a room of this dispiriting description that Wedgwood found himself at the end of his somewhat lengthy ride. He had been admitted to Number 59 by a girl in whom he saw a close resemblance to Mattie Patello. There was a portrait of Mattie on the mantelpiece; he recognized it at once. There were

others of the family, obviously of the family; there was even one of Janet Clagne, taken in her best raiment by a photographic artist—so styled—at Derby. And on the walls of this dismal front-parlour there were two enlarged photographs which the detective felt sure to represent the master of the house and his wife. He examined that which he took to be of Mrs. Patello with great care—Mrs. Patello certainly bore a strong resemblance to her sister, Mrs. Clagne; perhaps they were twins, thought Wedgwood. And as far as he could judge from a three-quarter length portrait, Mrs. Patello, like Janet Clagne, was tall and spare of figure, and, in his opinion, fitted in very well with the general description of the woman in whose company Avice Mortover had left Mornington Crescent.

The detective was turning from this work of art to that which depicted a gentleman whom he conceived to be Mr. Patello when the door opened and Mr. Patello himself entered. He was the sort of man who, in the privacy of his own house, wears list slippers, a disreputable coat, and an old smoking-cap; these furnishings of his outer man were all there in company with a mild and watery eye, a furtive manner and a general air of amiable incompetence, and Wedgwood was quick to notice them, and notice-

ing them, to understand Miss Mattie Patello's references to her paternal parent.

"Sorry to intrude upon you, Mr. Patello," he began as the master of the house stood before him, nervously rubbing a pair of delicate-looking hands and blinking wonderingly at his visitor. "I called to see if you could give me a little information. The fact is, sir, I'm a police-officer—my card, Mr. Patello—and I'm enquiring into the disappearance of a young lady who left her lodgings three evenings ago and has never been heard of since. Name of Mortover, Mr. Patello."

Mr. Patello started and stared: Wedgwood saw that his surprise was real.

"Mortover?" he said wonderingly. "I know that name, to be sure, sir! But I can't say I know any young lady of that name. An uncommon name, too, sir, is that!"

"Very uncommon, I believe, Mr. Patello—I never heard it till recently. This young lady's name is Avice Mortover. You don't know her?"

"Never heard of anybody of that name, Avice Mortover, in my life, sir! Who is she?"

Wedgwood, who had carefully considered his plan of action during his ride to Tooting, went straight to the point.

"Well, Mr. Patello, to be frank with you,

I've already made certain discoveries in the course of my investigations. This young lady, Avice Mortover, is the daughter—and only child—of one Matthew Mortover and his wife Louisa Patello. And—as the last-mentioned name is so uncommon—I take it that Louisa Patello was a relation of yours.”

Mr. Patello nodded.

“My sister, sir!” he answered. “And she did marry Matthew Mortover—oh, yes, I'm aware of that. And so—there was a child, was there? Dear me—and the child's this young lady you're talking of. Dear me!”

“You weren't aware of the child's existence, then, Mr. Patello?”

Mr. Patello waved his visitor to a seat and took one himself.

“I was not, sir!” he replied with emphasis. “Of course, if this young lady is the daughter of my sister Louisa, she's my niece, but I can honestly say that until you told me of it I didn't know it! The fact is, I've never even heard of my sister Louisa for—oh, I don't know how many years! Never, at any rate, since she married Matthew Mortover. That was the very last I ever heard of her. I don't even know if she's dead or alive!”

“This young lady's mother is dead, Mr. Patello.”

“Well, sir, as I say, I didn’t know it! I’ve no objection to telling you what I do know if it can be of any use in your efforts to trace this young lady. Our family, Patellos, hails from the North—the Peak district in Derbyshire, but such of us as are left—now only a brother of mine and myself—if Louisa is dead—left that region long ago to try our fortunes elsewhere. Louisa went out to Canada. A year or two after she’d gone she wrote to me to the effect that she’d met a young Derbyshire man, Matthew Mortover, there and had married him. From that day to this I’ve never heard a word of her or him. We know something of that Mortover family, for my wife’s sister Mrs. Clagne, has been housekeeper at Mortover Grange for many years—ever since her husband died, in fact, and of course we hear news occasionally—Mrs. Clagne was here not long ago, and she took one of my daughters back there with her, for a holiday. I’m given to understand that when old Mr. Gilson Mortover died, everything that was possible was done to find Matthew who’d married my sister, but it was all no use. Nobody has ever heard of him, nor of his wife, my sister, till now! And now—you say he left a daughter, and she’s missing. Very strange, sir!”

“There are some very strange features in

the case, Mr. Patello, and some that I needn't go into now. I'm sure, however, that the young lady I've mentioned is the daughter of Matthew Mortover and your sister Louisa, and I'm very anxious to find her. You feel confident that the present Mortovers know nothing about her?"

Mr. Patello shook his head with convinced assurance.

"I'm quite sure of that, sir!" he said. "If anything had been known at Mortover Grange of the existence of this young lady we should have heard of it from my sister-in-law, Mrs. Clagne, when she was here recently. Mrs. Clagne, is, so to speak, the presiding genius of that house! The present Mortover is a young man who was brought up from infancy by Mrs. Clagne—she's a mother to him and naturally knows and has a good deal to do with all his affairs. No, sir—the existence of a child of Matthew Mortover was certainly not known to Mrs. Clagne when she was here, or I should have heard of it."

"You don't think Mrs. Clagne may have mentioned it to Mrs. Patello, your wife?" suggested Wedgwood.

"I'm quite sure nothing of that sort was mentioned, sir. My wife would tell you so herself if she were at home. But she's away

just now visiting a sick friend. No, sir—I'm as sure as a man can be of anything that the existence of a child of Matthew Mortover's and Louisa Patello's is absolutely unknown to Patellos and Mortovers! It comes to me, that news, as a genuine surprise. And what's more, sir, knowing as I do something of the Mortover family and their affairs, I can foresee complications, legal complications, if this young lady really is what she claims to be, according to you—Matthew's daughter. Oh, yes!"

"What sort of complications, Mr. Patello?" asked Wedgwood. He had long since formed a decided opinion that his host was both honest and candid, and he now wanted to draw him out. "Legal, eh?"

"Legal, sir!" affirmed Mr. Patello with a vigour which surprised his listener. "Legal! For, as I said before, sir, I know something of the Mortover family history, and I know that old Gilson Mortover, father of Matthew, never made a will and therefore died intestate. Now, sir, all the property the Mortovers ever had to bless themselves with was land—real estate. Never worth anything, sir, that land until lately—poor, dank, unprofitable land, good for nothing but for a few sheep and cattle to scratch a miserable bite out of. But now—

now, sir, coal's been discovered under it, and—ah!”

Mr. Patello opened out his hands as if to indicate heaps of gold. Wedgwood made a show of interest.

“Indeed, Mr. Patello?” he said. “Mineral wealth, eh—beneath the surface. And as the old gentleman you mentioned died without a will——”

“That property, sir, passed to his eldest son, Matthew, and if this girl you speak of is Matthew's only child, it's hers, hers—the daughter of my sister Louisa, and my niece! I must see into it, sir! I know what I'm talking about, for before I went into the sugar-broking I was a solicitor's clerk and I know the law! If what you say is true the rightful owner of Mortover is not the lad Philip, but his cousin—Louisa Patello's daughter. I'm obliged to you, sir, for coming to see me, and you'll oblige me further by keeping me informed. That girl, sir, must be found!”

Wedgwood promised Mr. Patello that he would keep him fully posted up in the affair of Avice Mortover, and after a few more words on the matter, went away. He was convinced of Mr. Patello's transparency and ingenuousness—but Mrs. Patello was still an object of possible suspicion. And chancing across a

police-sergeant at the corner of Acacia Terrace, he introduced himself and getting into conversation asked him if he knew anything of the tenants of Number 59.

"Folks with the queer name?" answered the sergeant. "Patello? Yes, know 'em well enough! Father, mother, three daughters. Father's a quiet old chap who toddles off to the City of a morning and toddles back again of an evening—harmless. Girls play the piano all day—that sort!"

"Do you know the mother by sight?" asked Wedgwood.

"Well enough! Tall, thin woman. Looks as if she bossed the lot of 'em," said the sergeant. "You know the sort—wears the breeches, I should say!"

"It's taxing your memory," observed Wedgwood, "but have you ever seen Mrs. Patello in a heavy fur coat that came down to her ankles?"

"I have!" replied the sergeant, readily. "Saw her in it only last week, when that cold snap was on! Yes!"

Wedgwood left the deserts of Tooting with a distinct impression and a profound belief. The impression was that Mr. Patello was not taken into the confidence of Mrs. Patello and Mrs. Clagne; the belief was that Mrs. Patello

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was the woman who had lured Avice Mortover away from Mornington Crescent. The next thing was to hit on a trail. And that, he said to himself, was going to be a pretty stiff job. For at present he couldn't see a single mark or impress in the ground he must needs traverse.

There was nothing to be done now till next morning. But when that came and Wedgwood at his breakfast table opened his newspaper, he saw that somebody had been busy. For there, in staring letters in the personal column, were the words *One Thousand Pounds Reward*, and following close upon them the name *Avice Mortover*.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

NIPPY NOTTIDGE

Wedgwood as a lone bachelor living in lodgings had a habit of reading his morning newspaper as he breakfasted; his practice was to prop it up against the coffee-pot after pouring out his first cup. But on this occasion he had no sooner seen the words in big capitals than he laid down his knife and fork and seizing the paper in both hands leaned back in his chair and read the advertisement through from its first line to its last.

There was that in the advertisement which not only absorbed the detective's attention, but tickled his sense of humour. Its very phraseology suggested that it had been drafted hurriedly, probably as its originator stood at the counter of a newspaper office. But there was plenty of it. It set out that Avice Mortover, whose personal appearance was fully described, had left her lodgings in Mornington Crescent at such and such an hour on such and such a night in company with a woman who was also described, down to the heavy veil and long fur coat, and that she had not been heard of since.

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It set forth, too, that Miss Mortover's disappearance was possibly connected with the recent affair in Handel Street, W. C. And it wound up by offering a reward of one thousand pounds—spot cash—to anyone who would produce the said Avice Mortover or give information that would lead to her restoration to her friends—application to be made direct, in person, to James Nottidge, Nottidge House, Belsize Park, N.W. 3.

Wedgwood read the advertisement twice—hurriedly, the first time; carefully, the second, and then, careless of the fact that his bacon was going cold and his fried eggs congealing, he made for the door, called his landlady's boy, and thrusting a shilling into his hand bade him go forth and buy all the principal morning papers. There was a newsagent's close at hand and within five minutes the detective was in possession of several prints and rapidly turning them over. And—as he had more than half expected—he found the advertisement prominently displayed in every one of them.

“Cost him a tidy penny, that!” muttered Wedgwood. “Well—there's nothing like doing a job thoroughly when you once start! I could see he was an eccentric chap, too! Fairly gone on that girl, evidently. There's one thing certain—that advertisement will sharpen the

eyes and ears of a vast lot of people, and Mr. James Nottidge'll be answering his bell all day—usually for nothing!"

Then, reflecting that he himself had better be doing something, he finished his breakfast, prepared for going out, and having rolled his umbrella and fitted his hat and gloves to a nicety, set forth for Mornington Crescent, reflecting on matters as he walked along. By that time Wedgwood had arrived at a fixed opinion as regards the matter he had in hand. John Wraypoole had been murdered because he had discovered a secret about Avice Mortover: the person or persons responsible for his murder were also responsible for Avice Mortover's sudden disappearance. To track down one was to track down the other. And in his view of things the woman who had taken Avice Mortover away from her lodgings, doubtless on some plausible pretext, was Mrs. Patello. Mrs. Patello—in league, he felt sure, with her sister Mrs. Clagne. And Mrs. Patello had got to be found.

He had no expectation of news at Mornington Crescent, and he got none. Miss Mortover had not returned, nor had the landlady heard from her. But she had seen Nottidge's advertisement in the paper and was full of amazement at the sum offered as a reward.

"Ought to produce some information, certainly," agreed Wedgwood. "Now, did Miss Mortover ever mention this young man to you, ma'am?"

"Well, she did just say there was a young gentleman," admitted the landlady. "That was the very evening she disappeared. She was shy about it—but she did make mention of it. A well-to-do young man, evidently!"

"Quite so, ma'am—able to put down a thousand of the best, anyway!" said the detective. "And a man who can produce a thousand pounds at will has a few more thousand pounds in reserve—you may be sure of that!"

"Well, I'm sure I hope she'll be found, and safe," sighed the landlady. "Such a nice thing for a girl that's earned her own living, to get a rich husband!"

Wedgwood refrained from saying that if all went well, Miss Mortover would prove a highly desirable prize in the marriage market; he bade the landlady communicate with him if she heard anything of her missing lodger and went off to Hunter Street. And as he was about to enter the police-station he came face to face with Thomas Wraypoole.

Thomas Wraypoole looked angry—or, perhaps, puzzled to the verge of annoyance. He had a folded newspaper in his left hand, and

as he caught sight of the detective he pointed to it with his right.

"Here, what's the meaning of this?" he demanded, without preface. "I came straight here to ask you that! You've seen it, of course. This advertisement about a missing girl—Avice Mortover. What's it mean? How's she connected with my brother's death?"

"Come inside, Mr. Wraypoole," answered Wedgwood. "I'd be glad of a few minutes talk with you. Now," he continued when he had conducted the oil and colour merchant to a private room, "if you'll look again at the advertisement, you'll see that it doesn't say that this girl was connected with your brother's death—murder, I prefer to phrase it. What it does say is that her disappearance—which we think is really abduction—is connected with his murder: believed to be connected, that is."

"Don't see much difference!" said Thomas. "Who is she? What's the connection?"

Wedgwood did not immediately answer that question. He was wondering how far he could take Thomas Wraypoole into his confidence. Suddenly he remembered that Avice Mortover's disappearance and Nottidge's advertisement would remove a good deal of the curtain he had kept drawn.

"Mr. Wraypoole!" he said. "I believe you

and your brother originally came to London from the Netherwell neighbourhood, in Derbyshire?"

"Well, what if we did?" demanded Thomas.

"You were young, I know, but not so young that you weren't familiar with the names of people and places thereabouts. Don't you remember a family near Netherwell of the name of Mortover?"

"Can't say that I do, now. No!"

"Your brother did!"

"Likely! John was that sort. Always crazed about the history of the old place—antiquary, d'you see. Pedigrees—genealogical stuff—old parchments—deeds—that sort of rubbish. He used to read about it at the British Museum and the Rolls office. Didn't interest me a bit, that—I'm a business man. He was interested in our birthplace, and in its people. I wasn't! But what if there is a family down there called Mortover—same name as this girl? What's that got to do with what happened to John?"

Wedgwood suddenly made up his mind.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Wraypoole!" he said, looking steadily at his visitor. "Your brother John was murdered because he'd come into possession of a secret relating to the Mortover family! He was—silenced!"

Thomas Wraypoole stared—but Wedgwood found it impossible to decide whether he was surprised or incredulous.

“D’ye mean to say that’s a fact, Wedgwood?” he asked. “Fact?”

“Well, it’s an opinion which I feel sure will become a fact,” replied the detective. “I’ve no doubt of it.”

“What was the secret?” asked Thomas.

“That this young woman who’s now missing is the rightful owner of the Mortover property near Netherwell,” answered Wedgwood. “That’ll all come out, now! And, Mr. Wraypoole, it’s my belief that when you were asked by your brother to meet him on the evening of his murder, you were to be told about his discovery of that secret. He may have had some reason for telling you.”

“Well—I never did meet him,” said Thomas.

“So you have always said,” remarked Wedgwood, dryly. “And of course we’ve taken your word. But if you want plain truth, Mr. Wraypoole, I’ve wondered myself, if you’ve ever told me all you really know about that evening! Now I’ll tell you something I’d like to know. I’ll accept your word that you never met your brother, *to speak to!* But . . . *did you see him that evening?*”

Thomas Wraypoole started. Then he glanced at the door.

"All safe!" said Wedgwood. "Come now—between ourselves?"

"Well, between ourselves, then!" replied Thomas. "Yes—I did see him! Only see him, mind you."

"Where?"

"That I won't say. It was on my way to meet him."

"Why didn't you speak to him?"

"Because he was in conversation with another man."

"Did you know the other man?"

"I did—well enough!"

"Who was he—who is he?"

"No! You'll not get that out of me, Wedgwood, for anything!"

"But why not? Between ourselves!"

"No, not between ourselves. I'm not going to drag innocent people into trouble. If I told you who this man was you'd be after him at once, and I know, of course, that it would be just a bit of talk that he'd be having with John."

"I should only ask him for information—if he could give any."

"He couldn't give any. I know that. I've

seen him since—several times. He and John had just met casually in the street. No!”

“And instead of stopping to speak, although you knew John wanted to see you, you passed these two——”

“I didn’t pass them. I chanced to see them on the other side of the street. I went on—to where I expected to meet John.”

“And John never came?”

“He never came!”

“Then, for anything you know, he may have gone somewhere with this man!”

Thomas remained silent: it seemed to Wedgwood that some new train of thought had been aroused in him. He suddenly rose from his chair.

“I’m not going to tell you who that man was, Wedgwood, if that’s what you’re after,” he said with decision. “At any rate, not now! But I’ll promise you this! If I think it’s necessary—and I’ll admit that your last remark’s a pertinent one—that John may have gone somewhere with him—I will! But that’s all—at present.”

He went away without another word, and before Wedgwood had time to reflect on what had passed between them, Mr. James Nottidge was announced. A question was off his lips before he had well crossed the threshold.

"Heard anything?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing definite," replied Wedgwood. "You're more likely to hear something first after that advertisement. You lost no time!"

"My way! They called me Nippy Nottidge at school. Stuck to me, too, that has. If there's a thing to be done, do it quick! That's my motto!"

"Must have cost you a lot of money that advertisement, Mr. Nottidge!"

"Nothing to what this business has cost me in anxiety—fact! I say—can't you suggest something? What are you doing—the police?"

"You haven't left me much to do in the publicity line," said Wedgwood. "Do you realize that that advertisement of yours will be re-printed as news in every paper in England? Something'll come of it. But if you'll sit down I can tell you what I did last night after seeing you."

Nottidge listened avidly to the detective's account of the Patello household.

"You think Mrs. Patello's the woman, then?" he asked eagerly, when Wedgwood had made an end. "Why not be after her?"

Wedgwood smiled at his visitor's obvious eagerness.

"How would you do that, now, Mr. Not-

tidge?" he asked. "If you go a-hunting, you know, you've got to locate your fox first!"

"You mean you've got to take your hounds where a fox is likely to be found!" answered Nottidge. "Go where Mrs. Patello's likely to be found—or heard of!"

"If you can suggest where," said Wedgwood still smiling. "Eh?"

"I reckon old man Patello knows that!" declared Nottidge. "Try that!"

"And I reckon he doesn't!" retorted Wedgwood. "Mrs. P. no doubt told him that she was going to see a sick friend, as he said to me. But I regard the sick friend as a myth!"

Nottidge rubbed the tip of his nose with the knob of his walking stick during a moment's reflection.

"Well, I'll bet there's some news of Mrs. Patello to be got at her own house, anyway!" he said at last. "And if not there what about another place—this Mortover Grange you tell me of. For, if I know anything—I mean if I can put two and two together—I reckon this Janet Clagne woman knows something about her sister's movements! In the plot—that's about it!"

"Now there I am with you!" exclaimed Wedgwood. "My belief is that Mrs. Patello and Janet Clagne have worked——"

Before he could say more a police-constable put his head into the room and looked enquiringly from Wedgwood to his visitor.

“Telephone call,” he said. “Somebody’s asking if a Mr. Nottidge is here? If so it’s his housekeeper wants to speak to him.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE WAITER AND THE CABMAN

Nottidge came back from the telephone alert and eager, beckoning Wedgwood towards the door.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "There's a man at my house who wants to see me about the advertisement! Let's get up there, sharp!"

"All right," assented Wedgwood. "But give me your telephone number in case anybody calls here for me while I'm out." He left the number and instructions with the station sergeant and followed Nottidge into the street. "Don't be too sanguine about news," he continued as they entered the first passing taxi-cab. "I've been at this game before, you know! You've no idea how an offer like yours rouses the cupidity of people—the sort of people who are always on the look-out for getting a good deal for very little. You'll probably have no end of applications—most of 'em no use whatever!"

"Why no use?" demanded Nottidge impatiently.

"There are thousands of tall, spare women going about London in fur coats!" answered

Wedgwood, with a cynical laugh. "After your advertisement this morning they'll all be objects of suspicion, especially if accompanied by a younger woman! However, I hope you'll get some reliable news. Anything in the way of a first step's worth having."

Nottidge moved impatiently in his seat.

"Put me on the track," he said. "Just that—and you'll not get my nose off the scent! I'm going to find my girl whatever it costs, and whatever has to be gone through. And I don't care how many people are after that reward—the more the better! After all, people can't disappear like—like a drop of rain in the sea—impossible!"

"Can't they?" laughed Wedgwood. "When you've had as much experience as I have, you'll alter your opinion! I can assure you that people can utterly disappear—disappear as if they'd never existed—and in no place so easily as here in London. Disappearances—known dozens of 'em!"

"Well, this isn't going to be a total one, anyway!" declared Nottidge, doggedly. "I'm on at this! Let's get a start—that's all I want."

"In my experience," said Wedgwood, "a start isn't difficult. The critical time is when you've got half or a quarter or three-quarters

along your track and you suddenly find yourself up against a blank wall which you can't climb or a yawning gulf which you can't bridge! What then?"

"Go round 'em!" retorted Nottidge. "Pick up the trail on the other side! Here's my little establishment."

Nottidge House at which Wedgwood glanced with interested curiosity, proved to be a somewhat pretentious modern residence of the villa type, set in a garden much ornamented by statuary and furnished with a miniature lake and a pagoda. The detective felt sure that at any other time Nottidge would have insisted on showing him over his domain before leading him on to the house, but on this occasion he was hurried to the imposing front door, where an elderly, buxom woman stood at the top of the steps, evidently eager to see her employer.

"There's two of 'em now, Mr. Nottidge!" she announced. "The second came just after I'd telephoned to you—not five minutes after. I've put them both in the little breakfast parlour—they're honest-looking men, though the first one seems to be some sort of a foreigner. But of course I've kept an eye on them."

Nottidge beckoning the detective to follow him strode through the hall, and flinging open a door at the end bustled into a small room

wherein, on opposite sides of the centre table each holding his hat on his knees sat two men, whose outward appearance Wedgwood immediately set himself to examine. One he at once set down as a waiter and probably an Italian; the other he saw to be a taxi-cab driver. And he saw, too, that each man was anxious to speak first. But Nottidge was equally quick to see that and was equal to the occasion.

"Want to see me about my advertisement in this morning's paper, eh?" he said without ceremony. "Very well! Now which got here first?"

The man whom Wedgwood classed as a waiter spread his hands.

"Me—I am here first. I come—yes, ten minutes, fifteen, perhaps, before him. The lady outside—she tell you so."

"All right!" said Nottidge. "You're number one, then." He drew a chair to the table and motioned Wedgwood to a seat close by. "Go ahead!" he commanded. "What have you got to tell?"

The waiter produced Nottidge's advertisement, carefully cut from its context, and laying it on the table put a forefinger on it.

"These ladies—what is describe here—I see them!" he began. "What you call identify

them as soon as I read this in the paper. Oh yes—no mistake!”

“Where did you see them, and when?” asked Nottidge.

“It is three nights ago from last night. At Cipriani’s Restaurant, in Tottenham Court Road, where I work—I am waiter there—been there four years. Name of Marco. Mr. Cipriani, you go ask him, he give me first-class character. Honest!”

“All right, Marco! Now tell what you know about these ladies.”

“Well, it is like this. Just before eight o’clock that evening, a gentleman comes into the restaurant and seats himself at my table, see? I go to him—he say he is expecting two ladies to join him in a few minutes and will take an *aperitif* till they come. I serve him—he lights a cigarette, sips his *aperitif*, and waits. Just about eight——”

“Stop a bit,” interrupted Wedgwood. “What was this gentleman like? Describe him.”

“Oh, I don’t know! Just an ordinary gentleman—well-dressed. Middle-aged, I think. Dark moustache. Might be a Frenchman.”

“You didn’t observe him very particularly?”

“Well, not so very. See a great many like

him, regular. There was nothing very remarkable to see."

"Would you know him again if you saw him?"

"If I saw him with the ladies I would know him for the same. Otherwise, you understand, there are many gentlemen like him—dress like him—well-to-do. What you call here in London, City men. Prosperous looking!"

"Well, go on!" said Wedgwood. "Just about eight——?"

"Just about eight o'clock two ladies come in. Just what is describe in this advertisement. One is a tall, thin lady, in a fur coat and with a lot of veil stuff about her face; the other is a young lady. They go to the gentleman where he sits at my table. I think the young lady is not known to him before then."

"What makes you think that?" asked Nottidge.

"I see the other lady, the older one, do the ceremonies—introduce them. He is a very polite man, that gentleman—make great fuss of the young lady, like he was delighted to meet her, eh?"

"Oh, he did, did he?" growled Nottidge. "Well—get on with it!"

"They all sit at my table—they have dinner together. Very nice dinner—the gentleman

takes great pains, ordering it. They seem to enjoy it. Champagne, too—oh, yes: do themselves very well, as they say.”

“Did the young lady seem at home?” enquired Wedgwood.

The waiter looked puzzled.

“At home—I don’t understand,” he said.

“I mean did she seem as if she knew the other two? Did she seem—friendly with them, as if they’d met before?”

“Oh, I don’t know that! They pay great attention to her—very polite, you know. Talk and smile to her—much.”

“Well—what about after they’d dined?” asked the detective. “Did they leave, then?”

“No—they sit talking over their coffee. The gentleman, he smokes a cigar; he and the other lady have liqueurs with their coffee; the young lady not. They talk a lot with their heads together, eh? Then the gentleman he ask me for telegram forms, and the young lady she writes on two of them and gives them to him, and he puts them in his pocket.”

Wedgwood turned to Nottidge who was taking all this in with a frown on his face.

“Does Miss Mortover know your address?” he murmured. “She does—then you may be sure one of those telegrams was for you, and the other for the landlady at Mornington Cres-

cent. And they haven't been delivered! Well?" he went on, turning to the waiter. "What after that?"

"The gentleman pays the bill and they go. See no more of them. But"—here he spread out his hands with an emphatic gesture—"those are the ladies described in the advertisement! I come here—quick—as soon as I see the paper this morning."

"Did you open the door for them when they left?" asked Wedgwood. "Just so—I thought you would. Very well—I know where Cipriani's is. Which way did they turn? Up or down?"

"Down! They walk away towards the corner of Oxford Street."

Wedgwood turned quietly to the other man who had listened to the waiter's story with evident interest.

"I expect this is where you come in, my lad, isn't it?" he said with a smile. "You picked up these three people at the corner, eh?"

"Well, just about it, guv'nor," answered the man promptly. "'Tween that and the Oxford Music Hall door. A gentleman and two ladies—same as what he describes."

"What time was that?"

"Nine-twenty, guv'nor—to the minute! I'd just looked at my watch."

"Well, where did you drive them?"

"Where the gent ordered—front of the Great Western Hotel, Paddington."

"Praed Street entrance to the hotel, you mean. Well, what happened when you got there?"

"Can't say as anything happened, guv'nor. They got out and the gent paid me. But I noticed they didn't go into the hotel."

"Didn't, eh? Where did they go?"

"Walked along the front towards where you turn down at the side of the hotel to the Departure Platform at Paddington Station."

"Did they turn down?"

"That's just what I can't say, guv'nor! I turned my cab there and went off. But that's the direction they was making in—where you turn down to the station."

"Seem on friendly terms while they were in your cab, and when they got out?" enquired the detective.

"As far as I know, guv'nor, yes. Walked away together very friendly, like—chatting. The young lady was in the middle of 'em. Took 'em for pa, ma and daughter, I did!"

Wedgwood turned to Nottidge. But before he could speak Nottidge's housekeeper opened the door and handed her master a telegram.

"Just come!" she said. "The boy's waiting."

Nottidge tore open the envelope, ran his eye over the message, crushed the flimsy paper in his hand with a gesture of annoyance, and turned to the housekeeper.

"No answer!" he growled. "Here, Wedgwood!" he went on. "Come out here a minute!"

He drew the detective into the hall and thrust the telegram into his hand.

"Look at that damned stuff!" he exclaimed. "What's it mean? And who the devil is it from?"

Wedgwood smoothed out the crumpled message, and first noting that it had been despatched from a City post-office and that the address was to James Nottidge, Esquire, Nottidge House, Belsize Park, with the word esquire spelled in full, read it carefully.

"No necessity whatever to worry about Miss Avice Mortover who is in perfect safety with good friends and will be forthcoming at the proper time and place."

"What's the proper time and place?" demanded Nottidge. "Who are the good friends? And why hasn't she written to me herself? What——"

Wedgwood interrupted him by nodding at the door of the room they had just left.

"If I were you," he said, "I should give these two fellows something—a judicious amount, you know—for their trouble, tell them they'll be remembered if their information produces anything, and get rid of them: I'll step into this room until you've done with them. Now," he continued when Nottidge had completed the suggested transaction, "about this telegram. I believe it's genuine!"

"How do you mean genuine?" asked Nottidge.

"I think it's got to do with Miss Mortover's claim to the Mortover property," replied Wedgwood. "How exactly I can't say—but that's my impression. There's this to remember—for anything I know, Miss Mortover's affairs, since I've seen her, may have been gone into by somebody."

"But why all this secrecy?" demanded Nottidge. "Why not do the thing above-board? Why carry her off——"

"There may be reasons—serious reasons. Anyhow," repeated Wedgwood, "I believe that's a genuine telegram—I mean, what it says is genuine. I should make my mind easy if I were you. It strikes me that the next act of this drama will be staged in the Law Courts!"

Before Nottidge could enquire what this cryptic suggestion meant, the telephone bell rang. Hunter Street police-station wanted Detective-Sergeant Wedgwood, if he was at Nottidge House. A moment later Wedgwood heard what was wanted—Mr. and Mrs. Patello to see him and waiting his return.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WHAT DID MRS. PATELLO WANT?

Leaving Nottidge to consider his next movement, Wedgwood hurried back to Hunter Street as fast as a taxi-cab could carry him. He anticipated little from another meeting with Mr. Patello, but the mention of Mrs. Patello's name had aroused a good deal of curiosity in him. Until a few minutes before his departure from Nottidge House he had stuck to his theory that Mrs. Patello, as the result of certain machinations known only to herself and her sister Mrs. Clagne, was the tall, spare woman in a long fur coat who had lured Avice Mortover away from her lodgings.

There was nothing in the statement of Marco the waiter and Hobson the cab-driver to controvert that theory. But when he heard that Mrs. Patello had called to see him at the police-station he began to be doubtful: it was scarcely likely, he thought, that Mrs. Patello would come seeking a police-officer if she had been mixed up in what to say the least of it was a doubtful proceeding. Still—he did not know Mrs. Patello. Mrs. Patello might be one of those

persons who are endowed with a double share of craft and ingenuity; she might be coming to see him with the idea of ascertaining exactly how much he, as the detective in charge of the case, really knew: he had known instances of that sort in his time. And when he walked into the room in which Mr. and Mrs. Patello sat awaiting his arrival he made a careful inspection of his lady visitor, and as a result decided that she was a worthy second to her sister Janet Clagne in respect of her possession of those qualities which may be summed up in one word—cunning. He saw, too, that whoever the woman was who had called on and gone away with Avice Mortover from Mornington Crescent, Mrs. Patello, as far as outward appearance was concerned, fitted in well with the description given by the landlady and Marco the waiter. She was tall, she was spare of figure; she wore a fur coat that came down to her ankles. All this struck the detective so much that as soon as he had said good morning to his visitors, he begged them to excuse him a moment, left the room and seeking out a colleague gave him some instructions.

“Look here!” he said, drawing the man to the street door. “Do something for me, at once! Get a taxi. Drive to Cipriani’s Restaurant, in Tottenham Court Road. Ask for a

waiter named Marco. Tell him the man who saw him just now at Mr. Nottidge's house wants to see him immediately. Bring him back here. When you get here stay with him outside, strolling in front until I come out with a man and woman who've come to see me. Tell him to take a good, close look at the woman, but don't attract her attention. Understand?"

The other man understood and hurried off, and Wedgwood returned to his callers and closed the door on them and himself.

"Now, Mr. Patello?" he said quietly. "What brings you and your wife here?"

Mr. Patello, who it was easy to see was a mere cypher in the presence of his better-half, looked helplessly in her direction. But Mrs. Patello was only too ready to act as spokesman.

"Well, you see, Mr. Wedgwood," she began in a soft, silky voice that seemed strangely in contrast with her vinegary appearance. "My husband came to see me early this morning in consequence of your calling on him last night, when, of course, I was not at home. For the last few days I've been nursing a sick friend of mine—Mrs. Parkinson, of Mavisdale Avenue, Clapham Common—which is why you didn't find me at Tooting. Now, Mr. Patello was so much upset by what you told him last night that he came to me and told me all about your

conversation as soon as he'd breakfasted this morning, and as a result, and though Mrs. Parkinson is really not fit to be left, I came here with him to see you."

"What about?" asked Wedgwood, curtly.

Mrs. Patello's thin lips smiled, and she inclined her head to one side with something of archness.

"Well, of course, Mr. Wedgwood, you'll allow that what you told Mr. Patello must needs be very disquietening to us," she answered. "I mean—to us as a family. This young woman that you speak of, and that's being advertised for in the newspapers, you know."

"What about her?" enquired Wedgwood.

"Well, according to you or to what she told you, she's the daughter of Matthew Mortover and of his wife Louisa, who was my husband's sister," replied Mrs. Patello. "If that's so it's a queer thing in my opinion that none of her relations had ever heard of her!"

"According to my information," said Wedgwood, "and to what Mr. Patello told me last night, none of you had ever heard of either Matthew or Louisa since they were married!"

"That is so, Mr. Wedgwood," agreed Mrs. Patello. "But they were far away—in Canada, we believed. Now according to the information you afforded to Mr. Patello last night, Matthew

died over there, and his widow, my sister-in-law Louisa, came back to England, and here to London, soon after his death bringing with her their only child, this girl we're hearing about. Well, now, why didn't Louisa, Mrs. Matthew Mortover as she was, communicate with her relations? She'd know of the Mortovers, of Mortover Grange, in Derbyshire; she'd also know of her own family, the Patellos. And Patello, Mr. Wedgwood, is, I believe, a very uncommon name—Louisa could easily have traced my husband, her brother. Why didn't she? Why was nothing ever heard of her until this girl comes forward to say what she does—that she's Matthew and Louisa's daughter and that her father and mother are both dead?"

"Can't say!" answered Wedgwood. "No idea, Mrs. Patello. I know nothing about the family secrets. My only concern in this is that it has to do with a much more serious affair—the murder of Mr. John Wraypoole."

Mrs. Patello shook her head.

"Oh, well, of course, Mr. Wedgwood, I know nothing about that!" she said. "Excepting what I've read in the papers. *My* only concern is about this young woman. I say it's a very strange thing that neither Mortovers nor Patellos had ever heard of her until now. *My*

husband never had; I never had; my sister Mrs. Clagne never had. Nobody had!"

"Are you sure your sister Mrs. Clagne never had?" asked Wedgwood.

"I'm sure of this, Mr. Wedgwood—my sister Mrs. Clagne was visiting us at Tooting not so very long ago, and stayed with us some days, and she didn't know of it then! She may know of it now, for she gets a London paper down there, regular, and I'm sure there was plenty about this girl in every paper yesterday! But she didn't know when she was at Tooting or she'd have mentioned the matter to me, of course."

"Did Mrs. Clagne ever mention Mr. John Wraypoole to you?" asked Wedgwood, permitting himself a direct question. "I mean—when she was staying with you?"

Mrs. Patello looked her astonishment, and the detective watching her narrowly, came to the conclusion that it was genuine.

"John Wraypoole? The man that was murdered? Never! How should my sister know anything about him?" she exclaimed. "Of course she didn't!"

"No 'of course' about it, Mrs. Patello!" retorted Wedgwood. "Your sister, I understand, is housekeeper to Mr. Philip Mortover at Mortover Grange, near Netherwell. Now

John Wraypoole came from that neighbourhood."

"So do a great many other people, Mr. Wedgwood," said Mrs. Patello. "I could name many here in London. But that proves nothing. Mrs. Clagne never mentioned Mr. John Wraypoole to me. Nor did she mention this young woman who calls herself, I'm told, Avice Mortover! There was nothing known of her, then—I mean at the time my sister was here."

Wedgwood remained silent for a few minutes. He was thinking; fitting things together. He knew, as a result of his investigations at Netherwell, that Janet Clagne was in London—that is to say, at Tooting—at the time of Wraypoole's murder; that just previous to that she had been in conversation with Wraypoole at Mrs. Chipchase's shop in Netherwell; and that there was strong presumption that when she and Wraypoole separated at the tea-shop door they arranged a meeting at the Russell Square Tube Station on the very evening on which, as it turned out, Wraypoole met his death. So—either Mrs. Patello was lying, with consummate art, or Janet Clagne had kept things strictly to herself.

"Why should you be concerned, Mrs. Patello, about this girl Avice Mortover?" he asked

suddenly. "How does the fact that she's turned up affect you?"

Mrs. Patello gave him a swift glance, which transferred itself to Mr. Patello. And Mr. Patello, who during the conversation between his wife and the detective had remained in obscurity, sucking the handle of his umbrella, uttered a sort of mournful exclamation, expressive of unrest. Mrs. Patello nodded, and spoke.

"Well, of course, Mr. Wedgwood," she said in a voice that was meant to be confidential, "of course, in these family matters there always is wheels within wheels: you'll know that as well as I do, and I daresay a great deal better, as you're a professional gentleman. You see, it's this way—I believe Mr. Patello told you last night that we know that old Gilson Mortover died intestate. He did—there's no doubt of it. Now Matthew survived him and was eldest son. And if this girl really is Matthew's only child——"

"She's a claim, and a strong one, to the Mortover property," interrupted Wedgwood. "Just so, Mrs. Patello! If she establishes that claim, it's hers. Well?"

"That's not agreeable to our plans, Mr. Wedgwood! You see," continued Mrs. Patello, her voice growing more suave, "the fact is, me and my sister Janet, Mrs. Clagne, has practi-

cally arranged a marriage between my daughter Mattie and Mr. Philip Mortover. Such a match would be to the benefit of all parties concerned. But a marriage with Philip Mortover as things are is one matter, and as they might be, if this girl turns him out of house and land is another! Do you follow me, Mr. Wedgwood?"

"Very well indeed, Mrs. Patello!" answered the detective. "You don't want your daughter to marry a poor man!"

"I don't indeed, Mr. Wedgwood, and I want to know what Philip Mortover's real position is!" assented Mrs. Patello. "As I say, Philip Mortover, as owner of Mortover Grange and appurtenances and vendor of land that has valuable minerals under it is one thing, but Philip Mortover, penniless younger son of a younger son, is quite another! I daresay you've daughters of your own, Mr. Wedgwood, and you'll understand me!"

"I understand you, Mrs. Patello—very well indeed!" said Wedgwood. "The appearance of Miss Avice Mortover, only child of Matthew Mortover, elder son of Gilson, materially alters matters!"

"It does indeed—if she really is that," assented Mrs. Patello. "And there's another thing, Mr. Wedgwood. This Mortover Main Colliery Company, now?"

"What about it, Mrs. Patello?" asked the detective, pricking his ears anew. "How does that come in?"

Mrs. Patello inclined her head to one side and smoothed the fur of her coat about her knee, regarding its texture as if it was something of which she was appraising the value. "Well, Mr. Wedgwood," she replied slowly, "and of course between ourselves—me and Mr. Patello are not wealthy people. But we always had a bit of money, and we've saved a bit more, and the fact is, my sister, Mrs. Clagne, has so cracked up this new colliery company to us that we've realized all we had and put the lot into it—shares, you know. And——"

"Mrs. Clagne persuaded you to do that, did she?" interrupted Wedgwood. "Such confidence in it, eh?"

"Well, of course, being on the spot and knowing all the gentlemen that's interested in it she has!" assented Mrs. Patello. "And to be sure, the experts are all agreed that it's one of the richest veins of coal ever struck in this country! Anyhow, Mr. Wedgwood, that's what me and Mr. Patello have done!"

"Has Mrs. Clagne put anything into it?" asked the detective. He was keenly alert by that time, realizing that Mrs. Patello was affording him valuable information instead of

getting anything out of him. "Has she invested money in it?"

"She has, Mr. Wedgwood—no secret about that," replied Mrs. Patello. "Mrs. Clagne, although she is and has for many years been housekeeper to young Mortover, as she was to Stephen before him, has money of her own. Clagne, he was a jeweller in Derby, and in a very good way of business, and he left her all he had—a nice thing! And she has invested largely in this Mortover Main Colliery Company, and one of her reasons in recently visiting us was to advise us to do the same. And we'd no hesitation, for I know my sister well enough to be sure that she'd risk nothing—she's as keen on money as anybody can be. And don't you see, Mr. Wedgwood, if this young woman really is the true owner of that Mortover property, why then, there'll be all sorts of complications arise, and perhaps our money mayn't be safe, and—and to put it in a nutshell, Mr. Wedgwood, can you really tell us whether this girl really is who she says she is—Matthew Mortover's daughter?"

Wedgwood rose to his feet. He realized what Mrs. Patello had come for. But he still had a lingering doubt about her.

"Can't say, Mrs. Patello," he answered. "She says she is. No doubt she has proofs—

papers, and so on. But—she's disappeared. I don't know where she is. And that's all I can tell you."

Presently he conducted husband and wife to the outer door. From its steps he looked across the street and saw his fellow-detective in company with Marco. They were smoking cigarettes as they lounged about; there was nothing in their appearance to excite suspicion. But Wedgwood saw the waiter look over Mrs. Patello with a keen, searching glance, and when she and Mr. Patello had gone round the next corner he beckoned him to come across.

"Is that the lady you saw at Cipriani's Restaurant?" he asked sharply. "Be sure, now!"

Marco shrugged his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

"No!" he answered. "At first I think, yes—then I make sure, no! What you call—eh—similar in figure, fur coat, so on. But not the same face—oh, no! Not the same woman at all—no—no!"

Wedgwood went back into the police-station and fell to discussing matters with the inspector to whom he had retailed all his previous news. They talked things over until their heads began to ache: finally, the inspector delivered himself of an opinion. Wedgwood, he said, must some-

how persuade, or tempt, or force Thomas Wraypoole to tell him who the man was that he, Thomas, had seen in conversation with his brother John on the evening of the murder, and that man must be found.

“Considering all one now knows,” said the inspector, “what you’ve got to do is to trace John Wraypoole’s movements and account for every scrap of his time and in whose company that time was spent, between the moment in which Thomas saw him talking to that man, whoever he is, and his arrival at Miss Tandy’s flat! Get on to that, Wedgwood!”

The name of Miss Tandy had scarcely been mentioned by the inspector when a policeman poked his head into the room and announced Miss Tandy herself.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE BILLHOOK

It needed but one glance at Miss Tandy's face to see that she had something of serious importance to communicate; that same glance showed, too, that whatever that something was, Miss Tandy had lost no time in hurrying to tell it. On all previous occasions whereon Wedgwood had encountered Miss Tandy she had always struck him as being remarkably prim and proper in her attire, as regarded her head-dress, her gown, and her foot-wear. But she presented herself to him and the inspector in a get-up which made Wedgwood immediately think of the days in which he had seen his own mother accoutred for that terrible domestic campaign known to English housewives as spring-cleaning. Miss Tandy's head was tied up in what was neither more nor less than a duster—a spotlessly clean duster, but still a duster. Her spinster-like figure was swathed in a gigantic pinafore of brown holland; a pair of old gloves protected her hands; her feet were encased in ancient list slippers. And—sure proof, not of abstraction, but that she had been

suddenly taken so much aback as to completely forget that she held it—her right hand grasped a carpet-brush, which, all unconsciously, she waved vigorously at the two men as she hurried into their presence.

“Come with me!” exclaimed Miss Tandy.
“Come with me—immediately!”

Wedgwood jumped to his feet; the inspector rose more leisurely.

“What is it, Miss Tandy?” he asked. “Something wrong?”

Miss Tandy continued to beckon them.

“Come!” she repeated. “I—I’ve found something! Something—it must be—to do with that!”

“The murder?” exclaimed the inspector, showing more interest. “What is it?”

“Come and see!” said Miss Tandy. “I haven’t put a finger on it! I ran—straight away! Come and see for yourselves!”

The other men in the police-station and the folk in the street outside stared as Miss Tandy led Wedgwood and the inspector forth and round the corner to Handel Street—Miss Tandy paid no attention to the interest her odd appearance created. But as they reached the foot of the main staircase in her building she spoke again.

“Not being particularly engaged just now,”

she said, "I decided this morning to spend a day in cleaning my parlour—it's a thing I do twice a year, as opportunity offers. And in moving a certain piece of furniture I made a discovery—a horrifying discovery! An object! Without touching it I ran headlong to find you!"

"Very proper, ma'am," said the inspector. "An object, eh? Now what sort of an object Miss Tandy?"

For answer Miss Tandy swept her companions into the parlour, where the carpet was up, brown holland sheets over the furniture, and newspapers pinned about the curtains, and leading them to a corner wherein a bureau had been partly dragged aside, pointed to something that lay between it and the wall.

"That!" she ejaculated in a horror-struck tone. "That!"

The two men craned their necks, looking around and over the top of the bureau. They saw something that looked like a weapon lying in the dust below. Without a word Wedgwood pulled the bureau further into the room, and, stooping, picked up and held out to the inspector a short, sturdy-looking thing, one end of which was stout wood, the other a curved blade of rusty steel

"A billhook!" he exclaimed. "And—see that?"

He pointed to a dark-hued patch on one side of the blade and shook his head significantly.

"Blood!" he said. "Blood!"

The two men and the woman stood for a minute in silence staring at this relic of a crime. Then the inspector took it out of Wedgwood's hand and went closer to the window.

"Don't know a tool of this sort by that name," he said. "Billhook, eh? Where do they call it that—I should have called it a wood-chopper! And what's it used for, where it's so called?"

"It's called a billhook in most country places," answered Wedgwood. "You see what it is—a curved blade of stout steel. They use it for lopping hedges, pruning, and that sort of thing. It could be used for chopping wood, of course. But billhook's what I've always heard it called."

"An old one, too, this!" remarked the inspector. "Edge blunted."

"Yes," assented Wedgwood. He took back the billhook, and began to point to it. "You see?" he went on. "All clean along the curved edge—clean of blood, anyhow. The murderer didn't hit Wraypoole with the sharp edge—he struck him with the back of this thing. That's

why the bloodstain is there, not along the edge."

Miss Tandy was listening, with parted lips and dilating eyes.

"You—you think that's what it was done with?" she asked.

"No doubt of it, ma'am!" replied Wedgwood. "Of course, the murderer slipped it behind your bureau as soon as he'd done what he wanted. Oh, yes, this is the weapon, for certain!"

Miss Tandy breathed a sigh of horror.

"And to think that I've gone on working in this room with that dreadful thing in it!" she exclaimed. "Of course, ever since that happened, my friends have done their best to persuade me to leave this flat, and to tell you the truth, I've never actually slept in it since the—the affair. But I've worked in it, every day—though I don't think I should have done if I'd known what was behind my bureau! At my very feet, as you might say! Ugh!"

Wedgwood was turning the billhook over and over.

"Not much chance of tracing the ownership of this thing!" he muttered. "It's an old one, to start with. Blade made in Sheffield—but lord, they make hundreds of thousands, millions, indeed, of such things there. It is yours,

of course, ma'am?" he asked suddenly turning on Miss Tandy.

"Mine!" shrieked Miss Tandy. "Good heavens, man, what are you talking about? I should think it isn't mine! Of course it isn't!"

"Some people keep a thing like this for chopping their firewood," explained Wedgwood. "I thought you might have had such a thing. Well, there's one thing certain, the—the murderer brought this with him! Therefore, he'd been carrying it about. With what object? To use it on John Wraypoole when the chance occurred. That's flat!"

"He could carry that in an overcoat pocket," observed the inspector. "Easy!"

"Oh, easy enough!" agreed Wedgwood. "It all fits in with what I've always said. Wraypoole was followed to this building by the murderer, who probably hung about when Wraypoole entered. When Miss Tandy went out the murderer came in, found Wraypoole alone in this room, struck him down, seized the manuscript, dropped this thing behind that bureau and made off before Miss Tandy could return. That's it!"

He picked up a newspaper from the floor and began to fold the billhook in it, Miss Tandy watching its disappearance with fascinated eyes.

"If you can only find out whose property that is," she suggested.

Wedgwood gave her a benevolent glance.

"You do well to say 'if,' ma'am!" he answered. "You know the old rhyme about if's and but's and apples and nuts, I dare say? However——"

He carried his parcel back to the police-station, where the inspector locked it up in company with the manuscript found in the street. And that done Wedgwood went to get his dinner at his favourite haunt, and after he had satisfied his appetite he smoked his pipe over a cup of coffee and gave himself up to thinking. The result of his thinking sent him down to Wandsworth Road, in quest of Thomas Wraypoole.

The oil and colour establishment of Thomas Wraypoole turned out to be a warehouse; above it were rooms evidently used as a private residence. The door of the warehouse was closed when the detective approached it, but there was another close by, and this, on his ringing its bell, was opened to him by a smart-looking young woman who eyed him narrowly as he raised his hat to her.

"Mr. Wraypoole anywhere about?" asked Wedgwood. "The warehouse seems to be closed."

“Mr. Wraypoole’s out at present,” replied the young woman. “But his apprentice is somewhere about. Is it anything I can do?”

“I want to see Mr. Wraypoole himself,” said Wedgwood. “When is he likely to be back?”

“I couldn’t say as to that,” she replied, still watching him closely. “He’s gone to the City, I believe, and he mayn’t be home till late. Perhaps you can leave a message for him?”

“No, thank you,” answered Wedgwood. “I’ll call again some time. Doesn’t matter about the name—I shall be looking in.”

He went off along the street, conscious that the woman was watching him; there had been a close enquiry in her eyes and an inquisitiveness in her manner which made him suspect that she took him for what he was. He walked along wondering about this—and suddenly, well down the road encountered Thomas Wraypoole’s apprentice, Stainsby.

Stainsby stopped, with a quick glance of recognition which swiftly changed to a look of enquiry. Wedgwood stopped, too.

“Hello!” he exclaimed. “You, eh?” He looked round and drew the apprentice aside into a narrow street that opened off the main road just there. “Just called at your place,”

he went on. "Closed, and Wraypoole not at home."

Stainsby was watching the detective in the same enquiring fashion as the housekeeper.

"Yes?" he said. Then, as if volunteering valuable information, he added. "He's out a good deal now—never knew him to be out so much!"

Wedgwood looked the apprentice up and down, considering him.

"Look here, my lad!" he said suddenly. "You've still got some suspicion about your master, haven't you? You had when you came to see me, you know!"

"I thought there were suspicious circumstances then, Mr. Wedgwood, and I think so now!" answered Stainsby. "Haven't changed my opinion—at all!"

"But you don't know any more?" suggested the detective. "You were to come and tell me if you found anything out—anything new."

"I can't say there's anything new," replied Stainsby. "Nothing positive! There's one thing I've noticed, though. Ever since that happened, Wraypoole's paid less and less attention to his business. He's left nearly everything to me. He's always out—most of the day he's out. And him and the housekeeper's out a good deal at nights, now—evenings, I mean.

I've the place pretty well to myself of an evening. It didn't use to be like that: he stuck to business well, did Wraypoole, before this affair, and he was rarely out at nights. Now he's in neither day nor night—till very late."

"Any idea where he goes?" enquired Wedgwood.

"I haven't! I don't know if she has—the housekeeper. Him and her's very thick now; I constantly see 'em talking together as if they'd some secret."

"Who is she—what's her name?"

"Mrs. Bowman," replied Stainsby. "She wasn't there when I first came; she's been there about nine months. She was wearing widow's clothes, then, but she soon left 'em off. I've had an idea that her and Wraypoole's thinking of getting married, but I haven't heard 'em say so."

"Um!" said Wedgwood. He stood for a moment or two, wondering if there was anything to be dug out of all this. Then he gave the apprentice a look that was intended to imply intense secrecy, and lowered his voice. "Look here, my lad!" he went on. "You can keep things to yourself as well as anybody, I'll bet! What?"

"If there's occasion," answered Stainsby, knowingly. "I can!"

"Well, here's a question I want to put to you—you'll not understand it, but you can answer it—I'll see you lose nothing by any help you give me. Now, I daresay you've a fair lot of old wood knocking about that warehouse—casks, boxes, such like, eh? And no doubt some of it's used for firewood, what? Just so—now who chops it up for firewood?"

"I do!" replied Stainsby, obviously surprised. "Why, Mr. Wedgwood?"

"Part of your job, eh?" continued the detective. "All right! What do you chop it up with, now?"

"A hatchet," said Stainsby. "What else?"

"Do you know what a billhook is?"

"Yes! Seen men trimming hedgerows with 'em in the country."

"Have you ever seen one, an old one, lying about at Wraypoole's? Have you ever had one in use there? Do you know if he had such a thing?"

But Stainsby shook his head.

"No! We've a couple of old hatchets—square-headed choppers, you know—in the wood shed, but I've never seen a billhook there."

"Well—keep what I've asked you to yourself," said Wedgwood. "And look here—if anything occurs, if you hear anything, or see

anything that seems suspicious, don't lose a minute in communicating with me!"

He went off then, wondering what to turn to next. If only he could get a clue to the ownership of the billhook, or the merest notion as to the history of the diamond that he had picked up from the floor of Miss Tandy's parlour. . . .

"Pretty fog-laden atmosphere!" he grumbled. "Thick!"

He was feeling it just as thick and fog-laden when, at noon of the following day, Stainsby came hurrying to the police-station, evidently bursting with news.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ABSCONDED

That the apprentice was full of what he evidently considered to be highly important news Wedgwood saw at the first glance. Nor did Stainsby waste time in prefatory remarks: the instant he caught sight of the detective he crystallized his tidings into one sharp exclamation.

“He’s off!”

Wedgwood started. Stainsby, of course, meant Thomas Wraypoole. And if Thomas Wraypoole had made himself scarce, why, then, there was strong presumption that he had good reason for flight, and he would have to be pursued. He wished now that he had kept a closer watch on him, for he knew Thomas to be a cute, sly fellow who, if he ran away, would do it cleverly. With a growl that showed a certain feeling of discomfiture, he motioned Stainsby to a seat.

“Well?” he said curtly. “Let’s hear about it! Where’s he off to? But, of course, you don’t know that, my lad!”

“No—but it might be found out,” said Stainsby. “Anyway, he is off—that’s certain.

I told you that he'd been away from the warehouse a great deal lately, going out of a morning and not coming back till latish at night. Well, yesterday morning he went out soon after breakfast, as had become pretty usual, but last night he never came in. This morning a man named Gregson came to the warehouse. He's a chap I've seen before now and then—I think he's had a similar business down Whitechapel way. He asked to see the housekeeper. I took him up to the living-rooms and called her. Then he told me that Mr. Wraypoole had sold him the business, stock, private furniture, everything in the place, and produced a receipt for the lot."

"How much had been paid?" asked Wedgwood quickly.

"Three hundred pounds," answered Stainsby. "I noticed that—I took care to glance at the figures."

"From what you know," said Wedgwood, "would that be a reasonable figure?"

"I should think not!" exclaimed Stainsby. "Giving it away, if you ask me! There's at least three hundred pounds worth of stuff in the warehouse now, and there's good furniture upstairs. I should think the furniture's worth three hundred."

"Um!" mused Wedgwood. "The housekeeper, now—did she seem surprised?"

"She said she was—but I'd an idea that she wasn't," replied Stainsby. "Took it quietly enough, anyway."

"Is she staying there?" enquired Wedgwood.

"Gregson asked her to stay and look after the place a bit till he could make arrangements for bringing his wife there," answered the apprentice. "She said she would."

"And you?" asked Wedgwood.

"I don't know what my position is," replied Stainsby. "I was bound to Thomas Wraypoole—apprenticed, of course. I don't think he could hand me over with the business. Gregson wants me to stop. But I don't know about it."

"Stop there a bit, anyway," said Wedgwood. "You may find something out. About Wraypoole, now—did Gregson say anything as to where Wraypoole had gone?"

"I asked him that. He said he believed Wraypoole was going to take up a foreign agency somewhere. That's all he knew."

"Did the housekeeper ask Gregson anything of that sort?"

"She didn't—that's one of the reasons I had for thinking she wasn't really surprised. I think she knew Wraypoole was going away: I think she probably knows where he is."

“Well, you keep an eye on her,” counselled the detective. “Watch her movements. If Wraypoole’s in London she may go to meet him. Don’t show any signs of doing so, but keep your eyes skinned—I’ll see you’re all right. And now look here—do you know where Thomas Wraypoole kept his banking account?”

“Yes!” replied Stainsby, promptly. “London and Surburban, in Wandsworth Road—two or three hundred yards from our place.”

“All right!” said Wedgwood. “I’ll make a private enquiry there. Now you get back to the warehouse and do what I tell you. If anything occurs you know what to do. But say nothing to Gregson.”

He sat for some time after Stainsby had gone, thinking things over. To a man of his habit of thought this last action of Thomas Wraypoole’s was highly suspicious. He began to think of the previous grounds for suspicion. There was the mystery of Thomas’s movements on the evening of John’s murder. There was the fact that on the evening he was certainly in the neighbourhood of Handel Street. There was the visit to John’s rooms first thing on the morning after the murder. There was the burning of papers and documents at those rooms; the carrying away of other things, probably destroyed elsewhere. And there was

the fact that by John's death Thomas came into a nice little property, easily realizable at a time when, according to Stainsby, business was not over good with him. Altogether, thought Wedgwood, there was a certain amount of presumptive evidence against Thomas to warrant. . . .

But there he stopped dead—as in every other passage of this case, he found a blank wall confronting him. He knew nothing conclusive. Suspicion, after all, he said to himself, is but suspicion, it isn't evidence. Evidence was what he wanted, even if nothing but circumstantial, and in the hope of getting something to add to his store he presently went off to the bank in Wandsworth Road and asked for an interview with its manager.

In the course of his professional career Wedgwood had more than once had occasion to interview bank managers and he was well acquainted with the fact that there is nothing to be extracted from them in respect to their customers unless very serious reason is adduced. This particular manager opened his eyes when Wedgwood explained the why and wherefore of his visit, and from a certain expression in his face the detective surmised that Thomas Wraypoole's recent doings had roused suspicion in other breasts than his own.

"Is Thomas Wraypoole actually suspected of his brother's murder?" asked the manager, assuring himself by a glance at his door that the clerk who had shown the detective in had closed it. "Actually?"

"I can't say actually," answered Wedgwood. "There are a great many circumstances which are highly suspicious. Supposing—just for the sake of supposing—that he is guilty, I have several pieces of evidence which would tell against him if they were supplemented by other pieces. I've built up a certain amount——"

"But the edifice isn't complete, eh?" interrupted the manager, smiling. "Well, I don't know where Thomas Wraypoole is—I'm of no use there. The fact is, he closed his account here yesterday, so far as we were concerned there was an end of him, you see. We don't know where he's gone. Sometimes when customers close an account, they do so by transferring it to another bank. He didn't. He just drew the whole of his balance—and there was an end of it."

"In cash?" asked Wedgwood.

"In cash! It was a considerable amount, too," replied the manager. "Under the circumstances, I can tell you something about his recent transactions with us. They didn't arouse

any suspicion in me, but I was certainly interested in them."

"I should like to know," said Wedgwood. "It's what I came for."

"Well," continued the manager, "until quite recently Thomas Wraypoole's banking account was in a rather poor way. I should say his business just about kept going, and that was all. He was certainly a little pressed for money not so long ago: now and then he arranged temporary over-drafts. Then he suddenly began paying in considerable amounts, and he told me that by the death of his brother he had come in for a nice bit of property and was realizing it."

"Yes," observed Wedgwood. "John left him everything. About six hundred pounds, I believe."

"About that," assented the manager. "He gradually accumulated it here—in cash. I imagine he realized all the property. But only a few days ago an unusual incident occurred. He brought here a cheque on a certain private bank—Fentiman's, in Lombard Street—and asked us to have it specially cleared. It was for five thousand pounds, made payable to him. But the signature of the drawer was unusual. Instead of initials and a surname it appeared to be all one name, and whatever that name

was it was utterly illegible! Our cashier brought it to me as a curiosity: I couldn't make it out—none of us could. It was a scrawl—a sheer scrawl that might have been in some foreign style of writing for anything I could tell."

"It evidently attracted you," said Wedgwood.

"It did—I never saw a signature like it. It looked to have been written with one of those wooden pens that gardeners use for the labels of plants and shrubs—you know. However, it was apparently quite in order and well-known to Fentiman's, for the cheque was cleared at once."

"Five thousand, eh?" observed Wedgwood. "And this was—when?"

"Two days ago," answered the manager.

"Then yesterday, when you say Wraypoole closed his account he would have a lot of money standing to his credit in your books?" suggested Wedgwood. "The proceeds of the sale of his brother's property and this five thousand pounds."

"He'd a balance of over eleven thousand pounds," replied the manager. "He drew the lot in Bank of England notes. They were chiefly of large denomination, but he took a certain amount in smaller notes."

"A man can do a lot of things with eleven thousand pounds at his command," remarked Wedgwood. "And he's a sharp, crafty man in my opinion, full of trickery. You haven't even an idea where he was going? I've heard that he told the man to whom he sold his business that he was thinking of taking up a foreign agency."

"Oh, I should say he's off abroad!" exclaimed the manager. "After hearing what you've told me it's the only conclusion I can come to. And if you really think that he murdered his brother——"

"I don't say that," interrupted Wedgwood. "He may have done. What I think is that if he didn't he knows who did! Or he may have a very strong suspicion. But you were saying——?"

"I was going to say that if you want him, why not try the ports if it isn't too late," said the manager. "Of course, he's got a good twenty-four hours start of you."

Wedgwood shook his head.

"If he's gone abroad," he said, "he probably went yesterday. It doesn't take long to slip across to France. I was in hopes when I came here that he'd possibly got a draft on some foreign bank from you, and that I could have traced his movements through that."

“Too cute for that!” replied the manager.
“He’d his money in his pocket.”

Wedgwood went away wondering what to do next. He was becoming more and more puzzled by the intricacy of the web which he had been given to take to pieces: it seemed to him that if he untied one knot it was only to find half a dozen present themselves in its place. But suddenly as he walked slowly along the gloomy streets a new idea came to him. If Thomas Wraypoole wanted to go abroad he would have to possess a passport. And Wedgwood knew something about passports. They are not got in a hurry; there are tiresome and tedious things to be done in getting them. Supposing you are a British subject, or naturalized in the United Kingdom, you have to fill up a declaration made by either a banker, or a mayor, or a magistrate, or a provost, or a justice of the peace, or a minister of religion, or a barrister-at-law, or a physician, or a surgeon, or a solicitor, or a notary public; the authorities may also require your certificate of birth and certain other evidence to show, one supposes, that you really are the person you claim to be. But that is not all. You must furnish with your application and its verification two copies of your photograph, one of which must be certified by the recommender. And you must

put in your application not less than four days before the passport is to be issued, when you must pay seven shillings and sixpence for it. And even then, unless you merely wish to travel to some one country there are tiresome things like endorsements and visas and other matters to obtain and attend to—the whole business is exasperating. But Wedgwood, reflecting on it, knew that if he could obtain information that Thomas Wraypoole had recently applied for and procured a passport it would show that for some little time he had been meditating taking his departure from his native land.

The Passport Office is in Queen Anne's Gate Buildings, not such a very long way from where Wedgwood remembered the existence of these tiresome documents, and he proceeded to walk in its direction. He had reached the southern end of Westminster Bridge when, glancing aside at the crowded traffic, he suddenly caught sight of Stainsby in a taxi-cab. The apprentice was leaning out of the window, pointing the driver either to something ahead or to some shop or office on the other side of the road. And Wedgwood, fancying Stainsby to be there on some business of his new employer's turned away, looking no more. Had he contrived to catch Stainsby's eye and gone over to speak to him, the detective would have saved himself

several hours of trouble and brought matters to an issue. But he attached no particular importance to Stainsby's presence there, nor in a taxi-cab; his head was still full of Thomas Wraypoole. He was wondering what he should do if he found that Thomas had got a passport. It depended, of course, if he had, on what country or countries it was available for. And there was the disturbing fact of the twenty-four hours start! That meant possible defeat for the present. And presently he encountered delay—unacquainted with its office hours he found on reaching it that the Passport Office closed its doors at four o'clock.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE MORNING GOWN

Wedgwood did no more that afternoon. For the first time since the Handel Street affair had been put into his hands he, to use his own expression, slacked off—his mental powers were becoming weary through sheer inability to see his way clear to any solution of the mystery. He put the whole thing out of his head, treated himself to a good dinner and to an evening at the theatre, and as a result of his festivities, woke next morning keener than ever to go on with his work. If he could only get a firm grip on one of the many strings. . . .

He was down to the Passport Office as soon as its doors opened at ten o'clock, and within a quarter of an hour he had made a discovery. Within the last week a passport had been granted to Thomas Wraypoole, and endorsed for the United States and for the Argentine Republic. But at the same time a similarly endorsed passport had been granted to *Mrs.* Thomas Wraypoole, described as Thomas Wraypoole's wife. This puzzled Wedgwood: he had been given to understand that Thomas

was a bachelor, whose establishment was kept up by a housekeeper. Was this a recent marriage—and if the bride and bridegroom were off on what was probably a flight as well as a honeymoon, to which of the two Americas had they gone—North or South? And from which English port—there were several to choose from: Southampton, Liverpool, London, Plymouth; it would take a small army of men to watch the departure of steamers from those places, supposing the fugitives were not off already. Still, something must be done—and in the idea of doing it, he went off to see the man who had signed the verifications requisite for both passports.

This was a solicitor, Mr. Morgan Pugh, whose office was in Wandsworth Road, and not far from Thomas Wraypoole's old warehouse. Mr. Pugh, a youthful gentleman who had apparently just commenced practice, was at liberty, said his one office-boy, and the detective was shown in to him.

"I called, Mr. Pugh, to make an enquiry," said Wedgwood, after explaining who he was. "You recently signed the verifications necessary for the issuing of two passports—one to Mr. Thomas Wraypoole, the other to his wife."

Mr. Pugh started, and stared at his visitor incredulously.

"I?" he exclaimed. "No, indeed! I don't know Mr. or Mrs. Wraypoole—never heard of them!"

"Mr. Wraypoole, until yesterday, had a business—oil and colour warehouse—near here," answered Wedgwood. "But—I've seen your signature to these verifications! Your signature and address!"

"Then you've seen forgeries!" said Mr. Pugh. "I've never signed a verification for a passport in my life—never even seen a form! You say you've seen my signature?" He seized pen and paper and dashed off his name. "Was that it?"

"No!" exclaimed Wedgwood. "The name, of course, but not the writing. So—Wraypoole must have forged your name to those documents?"

"Looks like it," agreed Mr. Pugh. "Where is Wraypoole?"

"I wish I knew!" said the detective. He made his adieu and went off. "I'll let you know when I find him!" he added, with a significant smile as he opened the door. "You shall know, quick enough!"

"Thank you!" said Mr. Pugh. "Deeply interested, I'm sure!"

Wedgwood went off muttering to himself. So Thomas was bold enough to do that, was he?

Well, that was a serious offence; he'd get him for that, anyhow, if he could only catch him. But this wife—who was she? Thinking that the housekeeper, turned over to Gregson with Stainsby and the furniture, might know, he went down the road to the warehouse.

The door of the warehouse was open, and a tall, somewhat distracted-looking man, in a much-stained overall, was standing in the middle of the floor, glancing around at the various goods as if either estimating their worth or thinking that they needed more orderly arrangement.

“Mr. Gregson?” enquired Wedgwood.

“That's me, sir—what can I have the pleasure of doing for you?” asked the new occupant.

“Bit out of order here, yet, sir—I only came into possession yesterday.”

Before answering Wedgwood looked about him. He expected to see Stainsby, but Stainsby was not visible. He went closer to Gregson and gave him a look which implied a desire for confidence.

“You bought this business from Thomas Wraypoole, Mr. Gregson, didn't you?” he said.

“Can you tell me where Thomas Wraypoole is?”

“Not the least idea, sir! He mentioned to me once that he thought of taking up an agency

in Germany. Another time I once heard him say that he'd ideas of going in for the oil trade in Russia. I don't know where he's gone."

"Have you known him long?" enquired the detective.

"Matter of three or four years, sir—just in the trading way."

"Do you know his wife?"

Gregson looked surprised.

"Wife? He hadn't a wife, sir. Bachelor, he was—he'd a housekeeper to look after this place. And——"

"Look here, Mr. Gregson!" broke in Wedgwood. "I'd better tell you who I am. I'm a police-officer—detective, you know—and I want Thomas Wraypoole! I want him in relation to more than one matter. And I should like to see that housekeeper you mention—I think she might give me some information. Is she in?"

Gregson who had stared his surprise at Wedgwood's first intimation, made a gesture with his hands.

"She isn't!" he answered. "I don't know where she is. She cleared clean out of this place yesterday afternoon, and I've never seen her since. So did the apprentice—young varmint! I've never seen him since! Both gone—confound 'em."

"When did Stainsby go?" demanded Wedgwood. He suddenly remembered his vision of the apprentice in the taxi-cab near Westminster Bridge. "What time?"

"Can't say!" replied Gregson. "I had to go out yesterday afternoon—I've still got my old business down Whitechapel way. They were both here when I left at two o'clock—when I came back at six they were flown! Dutch leave!"

"You think they've run away?" suggested Wedgwood.

"That's just what I do think!" agreed Gregson. "Nice conduct! And awkward for me. No help—and of course the living-rooms, upstairs, want seeing to."

"To be sure," said Wedgwood. "By the by, have you any objection to my having a look round those rooms?"

"Not a bit, sir, as long as you don't want me to go round with you! Go up with pleasure. And so," he suddenly added as he opened a door at the side of the warehouse, "so you're wanting Wraypoole? For what, now?"

Wedgwood shook his head.

"In connection with such a very serious matter, Mr. Gregson, that I don't like to say what till I get more evidence," he answered. "I

suppose you've heard of the murder of his brother in Handel Street, recently?"

"Good lord! You don't mean to say you suspect him of that!" exclaimed Gregson. "Come, come, I couldn't think that of him! He's a bit of a plausible chap, Thomas, but I don't think I could bring myself to believe that of him! His own brother!"

"I don't say I believe he murdered his brother," said Wedgwood. "But I think he knows something about it—may have had knowledge of it, after the fact."

Gregson leaned back against the door which he had just opened, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, showed an inclination to talk.

"Well, now," he said, "he's mentioned that sad affair to me. We've talked about it."

"You have, eh?" exclaimed Wedgwood, pricking up his ears. "What did he say about it?"

"We had a talk about it not so long ago, one night when he came to see me in Whitechapel about my buying this business," continued Gregson. "We went out and had a friendly glass together, and he talked about it. Now I come to think of it he mentioned you—that is, if you're Mr. Wedgwood?"

"I am!" assented the detective. "What did he say about me?"

"That you were on the wrong tack! The police, he said, had a genius for that sort of thing——"

"Did he say what he thought was the right one?" asked Wedgwood. "That's more to the point!"

"He didn't! But he did tell me this—if it's any use to you. He said that he himself had a very good idea indeed as to who it was that actually killed his brother, but that he was so convinced that it would be utterly and absolutely impossible to prove it that he wasn't going to say anything. It was one of those murders, he said, the secret of which never would be discovered."

Wedgwood turned towards the staircase.

"Oh!" he said dryly. "Well, I'm not of his opinion, Mr. Gregson. And if I am on the wrong tack, the best thing I can do is to hit the right one. Now I'll just have a look round."

"You'll find it a bit untidy up there, I fear," said Gregson. "That hussy went off leaving the rooms anyhow."

Wedgwood went up the stairs, wondering about certain of the things the new occupant of the premises had just said, and particularly about Thomas Wraypoole's remarks as to himself. He turned into what was evidently the principal sitting-room of the place and looked

about him. There, as Stainsby had said, was some good furniture; Gregson had certainly got a bargain in getting business and belongings for three hundred pounds—to Wedgwood's thinking that wholly inadequate price was a sure proof of Thomas's desire to conclude the transaction and get away. But what Wedgwood wanted was something that would give him an idea of where it was that Thomas had gone or was going. And suddenly he made a discovery, or rather a suggestion was thrust upon him. On a side-table, at the miscellaneous contents of which he threw a casual glance, lay a small pile of those ornate and well-illustrated pamphlets the great shipping companies issue and spread broadcast. And amongst them was something more pertinent to his business—a number of Cunard labels, some for use on cabin trunks, some for heavier luggage to be consigned below. Perhaps not much in these things . . . but it looked as if Thomas Wraypoole had not only been contemplating an Atlantic voyage but had been given a handful of labels for his baggage. What Wedgwood now handled were the labels that had not been wanted.

After a further general look round the sitting-room, the detective passed on to the bedrooms. He opened the door of one which was obviously Stainsby's—he recognized a suit of the ap-

prentice's, lying folded on a chair. Wanting nothing there he passed to another, which he saw to have been Thomas Wraypoole's. There he made a closer examination. And he saw at once that if Thomas had flown he had left most of his old feathers behind him. There were drawers full of clothes and linen; he appeared to have taken nothing, or little, of his personal apparel. Toilet articles were left on the dressing table, the room, indeed, looked as if its regular occupant was expected to step into it at any moment. And it, at any rate, was quite tidy—the bed made; everything in its place; towel on the rack, water in the jug.

But the next room, a woman's, was in utter confusion, as if its late occupant had left it in a hurry. Garments were thrown here and there; drawers and trunks lay open; there was evidence that various things had been hurriedly selected out of other things and the discarded objects left anyhow; on the bed lay certain articles of feminine attire which apparently had been exchanged for others of a similar sort and cast aside: it needed little more than a glance to see that in this room a woman had hastily dressed herself for a journey and had had no time to put the place straight before she went.

Wedgwood stood for a moment looking round him. He was recreating the scene which had

taken place there the previous afternoon; visualizing the missing housekeeper's hurried preparations for flight. Probably she had set off when Gregson and Stainsby were both out; probably Stainsby, returning, had caught sight of her going away, and had followed her; probably Stainsby was following her in the taxi-cab in which he, Wedgwood, had seen him at the Surrey end of Westminster Bridge. In that case where were they now—and why hadn't Stainsby communicated with him?

Suddenly the detective stepped forward and picked up the gown which had been thrown anyhow across the bed—a morning gown of blue linen. He held it up for a moment; then thrust a hand into the side pocket.

“If there's anything it'll be here!” he muttered. “And—it is here!”

He drew out a crumpled scrap of paper—a telegram. In another second he had read it at a glance, noting that its date was that of the previous day.

Catch 5.30 Waterloo will meet Southampton West 7.16.

Wedgwood laughed as he threw the gown back on the bed and put the telegram in his own pocket.

"They always forget something!" he murmured. "Leave something behind. Um! Handed in at Southampton, eh? And to meet at Southampton? Very good! Then that means——"

He turned swiftly, hurried down to the warehouse, and making a hasty adieu to Gregson, walked quickly along the street till he came to a newsagent's shop, where he bought a *Times* and a railway time-table. A glance at the shipping news in the *Times*, another glance at the time-table, and he turned to find a taxi-cab. The taxi-cab sped him to Waterloo; the 11.30 from Waterloo set him down at Southampton at 1.27. And there, as he stepped from the door of his carriage he saw Stainsby on the platform, staring about him obviously on the watch for somebody.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

PASSPORTS!

Whoever it was that the apprentice was expecting or looking for, he had failed to see Wedgwood as the long train steamed in, and the detective had to run after him along the crowded platform. At a touch on his shoulder Stainsby started and faced round; an immediate expression of relief on his face convinced Wedgwood that the lad had business for him.

"You got my wire then?" said Stainsby. "I was afraid you mightn't have it in time for this train."

"What wire?" asked Wedgwood. "I've had no wire!"

"Sent you a wire this morning at ten o'clock," answered Stainsby. "To Hunter Street."

"Ah!" said the detective. "But I haven't been at Hunter Street this morning, and they wouldn't know there where I was. But what about?"

Stainsby gave him a look that meant many things.

"They're here!" he replied. "And, for

two or three hours, safe! I've spotted 'em!"

"You mean"—began Wedgwood.

"Him—and the housekeeper," answered Stainsby. "Both! They're off to New York on the *Mauretania*. Sails at four o'clock."

Wedgwood glanced at the clock. It was a little after half-past one. He turned Stainsby towards the refreshment room.

"If you're sure they're safe," he said, "come and have a mouthful and a drink—I've had nothing since breakfast. Now," he went on, when they had got into a quiet corner, "tell me while we eat. First, though—I saw you in a taxi yesterday afternoon, near Westminster Bridge. Were you after—them?"

"Her!" answered Stainsby. "Only her! I'll tell you about it. Yesterday afternoon, Gregson said he had to go out to his place in Whitechapel. That would be about two o'clock. He left me in the warehouse, and the housekeeper, of course, was upstairs. About four o'clock when I was at the front of the warehouse talking to a customer, a telegraph boy came up to the side door. I don't know whether she'd been on the look-out for a wire coming—I think she must have been—but anyhow, she'd the door open the instant he knocked and took the wire from him. I heard her say there was no answer, and he went off. A few minutes

later she came to me and said that she'd had a telegram to say that her mother was very ill and she must be off at once—would I get her a taxi-cab in a quarter of an hour? Then she hurried upstairs. Well, I began to think things—I didn't believe her tale—I felt certain she'd been on the watch for that wire, and that it was from Wraypoole. So I thought I'd keep an eye on her. Now, there's a cab-rank close by the warehouse, and I know some of the taxi drivers on it. I went across and spoke to two of them—gave 'em the office, you know. I arranged with one to come up to the side door in a quarter of an hour to take her; as soon as she'd gone off the other chap was to come up, take me in, and follow the first, see?"

"Good lad!" murmured Wedgwood, who was steadily munching sandwiches and listening with all his ears. "Splendid! Go on!"

"Well, I went back. She came down all ready in ten minutes or so with a small hand-bag. She told me to tell Gregson she didn't know when she'd be back, and he'd have to get somebody else—she'd be obliged to nurse her mother. The first cab came up and she went off, first telling me to tell the man to drive to Liverpool Street—she'd said to me that her mother lived in Essex. The other cab came as soon as hers had gone; I locked up the ware-

house, got into the cab, and we followed at a short distance. When we got to where York Road turns out of Westminster Bridge Road I saw her lean out of her cab window and motion the driver to some place on the top side of the street, so I drew my driver's attention to it."

"That was when I saw you," said Wedgwood. "Well?"

"Her cab pulled up at a shop—a newsagent's, a small place. She got out and went in. Of course, we pulled up at a safe distance and watched. Almost as soon as she'd gone into the shop, she came out again, gave her driver something, and went back into the shop. He turned his cab, and came along past us. As he was in the know he drew up by us a minute and spoke to me through the window. 'Says she ain't going further at present,' he told me. 'But you look out!' he went on. 'There's two trunks just inside that shop, with what looks like steamer labels on 'em!' Then he moved off, and we watched, and in a few minutes she came to the door with a man, and presently they signalled a taxi that was going past with its flag up. The man in the shop door brought out the trunks and helped the driver to put them on his cab. She came out, got in, and

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they went off. And of course we followed—to Waterloo!”

“Not to Liverpool Street and mother!” observed Wedgwood sarcastically. “Well—you’d be beginning to feel the pleasures of the chase by that time, my lad, what?”

“I was beginning to feel that I’d got my work set!” replied Stainsby. “I was afraid she’d see me at Waterloo, crowded though it always is. Then again, I’d not much money on me, only about ten shillings. But I got over that—I borrowed a couple of pounds from the taxi-chap. And I continued to dodge her splendidly in the station until at last, when she left her trunks with a porter while she went into the waiting-room, I managed to slip past them and get a glance at the labels. They were steamer labels—for the *Mauretania*. So I knew I was safe then, and I didn’t bother to keep an eye on her any longer. I went straight off and got a ticket for Southampton and went to the train and got into a far side corner of a smoking-carriage. And at last I saw her pass, with her trunks, and get in further up.”

“That was the five-thirty, I suppose?” said Wedgwood.

“It was—and it got here to this station at seven-sixteen,” agreed the apprentice. “And just as I expected there was Thomas Wray-

poole on the platform! Then, of course, I had to do the dodging game again. It was fortunate for me that it was evening, but though it was I had to be jolly careful. However, they never saw me, but I did see enough to see that after they'd got her two trunks on to a barrow Thomas had another, similarly labelled, fetched from the left luggage office. After that they got a cab and drove off—and I lost 'em! When I wanted a cab there wasn't one. I'd a nice hunt for them last night, I can tell you, Mr. Wedgwood! I hung round the principal hotels, peeped into windows, and ventured into two or three, but I couldn't find them. At last, I found that the *Mauretania* didn't sail till four o'clock this afternoon, so I turned into a small hotel myself near the Docks and went to bed. But this morning—I got 'em!"

"How?" asked Wedgwood, who by this time was beginning to admire his amateur assistant's powers. "Accident—or what?"

"Well, it was accident," replied Stainsby, candidly. "Good luck! The hotel I put up at is on the other side of a sort of park opposite the Dock Gates. I was looking out of the window as I was dressing, and I saw Thomas Wraypoole standing near the Dock Gates talking to a policeman. After a bit he turned away and went back across the road to a side en-

trance of the big hotel at the corner, the South-Western. He went in—and that's where they are! What're you going to do about it, Mr. Wedgwood?"

Wedgwood drank off the last mouthful of his glass of beer, rose, buttoned up his overcoat, and picked up his umbrella, all with an air of determination.

"Do, my lad?" he answered. "Well, I'm going first of all to pay a visit to the police authorities here, to give certain information, and to get the assistance of another man. And then I'm going to see Mr. Thomas Wraypoole, who from what you tell me seems safe until at any rate four o'clock."

"And—collar him?" asked Stainsby.

"I don't think Thomas'll cross the Atlantic this trip, my lad!" answered Wedgwood. "Well, now, come along, and we'll find the police headquarters."

Stainsby cooled his heels in an ante-room of the police-station for some little time before Wedgwood, meanwhile closeted with various officials, appeared again. He began to get restive, having ascertained during the morning that intending passengers for New York could go aboard the *Mauretania* some little time before the vessel was due to sail: it seemed to him that if his late employer once got aboard and

amongst a vast crowd of travellers all hope of finding him would be gone. But Wedgwood, when he at last came back to him showed no symptoms of anxiety or haste: he motioned Stainsby out into a corridor where two quietly dressed men eyed him over with evident slightly amused interest.

“This is the young hopeful!” said Wedgwood, with a wink at the two strangers. “All there! Now Stainsby, my lad, your turn to be useful comes in. Go down to the Docks with these friends of mine: they know where to go, and all you’ve got to do is to go with them. But when you get where you’re going, you’re to keep your eyes skinned for Thomas Wraypoole! And as soon as you catch sight of him, you’re to point him out to these gentlemen. See?”

“All right!” said Stainsby. He looked the two men closely over, and turned to Wedgwood. “You ought to remember,” he continued, “that passengers can go on board some time before the ship’s due out. Wraypoole may be on board now.”

Wedgwood smiled and patted Stainsby’s shoulder.

“Good lad!” he said. “Nothing like thinking on all sides. But Wraypoole isn’t on board my lad—Wraypoole and his wife are at this

moment finishing a late lunch at the South-Western Hotel and he's arranged with the hall-porter to send his light luggage across to the steamer at precisely half-past three. Cute chap, Thomas Wraypoole, my lad!"

He laughed and turned away to a uniformed man who was awaiting him, and Stainsby went out into the street with the two detectives.

"What did Wedgwood mean by saying that Thomas Wraypoole's a cute man?" he asked suddenly. "What's he been showing any cuteness about?"

The two men exchanged glances and laughed quietly.

"He meant that Wraypoole's cute enough not to go abroad till the last minute," replied one. "Slip through when things are busiest, eh?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Stainsby. That had not struck him. "There's one thing I should advise you to be careful about," he went on after a pause. "Wraypoole's not the sort to stick at anything if he gets in a tight hole!"

"Ah!" said the other detective, dryly. "We'll bear that in mind! Likely to have anything nasty on him?"

"I don't know," answered Stainsby. "He may have a revolver for all I know. And he

mayn't! But if he has I know who'll get the benefit of it if he's a chance to handle it!"

"Who, then?" asked the man next him.

"Me!" retorted Stainsby. "If he catches sight of me, with you, he'll be fit to play hell!"

"Ah!" said the detective. "That would be unpleasant! But we'll take care that he doesn't catch sight of you! Your job, and ours, is to catch sight of him!"

"There's one thing you're forgetting," remarked Stainsby, shrewdly. "Supposing he catches sight of me before I catch sight of him. What then?"

The two men laughed.

"All right," said one. "But as a matter of fact, he and his wife'll be followed from the time they leave the hotel, so that's all right. And we'll put you where he won't see you!"

"Seem to be taking no chances!" said Stainsby.

"Naturally!" assented the detective. "Your friend Wedgwood isn't, anyway."

"Why hasn't he come along?" asked Stainsby. "I thought he'd be keen to be in at it!"

"He'll be in at it all right, when what they call the psychological moment comes," answered the detective. "You trust him for that!"

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He and his companion led Stainsby by various ways evidently well-known to themselves, and past various steamship officials until the apprentice found himself in a vast shed amongst groups of people and piles of goods; through one of many open doors he saw, just across a narrow quay the long, black bulk of the great ocean liner. And through another open door he saw a gangway leading up from the quay to the deck, and at its foot uniformed officials and near them a board on which in big letters was the word *Passports*.

One of his companions touched Stainsby's shoulder, motioning him to a pile of goods near the door.

"You slip behind that," he said. "You'll get a view of the landing-stage from there without being seen yourself. When you see him approaching, give us a wink—we'll do the rest."

Stainsby took up his position. On the quay-side, and on the decks of the great liner things grew busier and busier. Men and women, mails and merchandise were being crowded on board; everywhere there was bustle and confusion. And suddenly he saw Thomas Wraypoole and the housekeeper. They came hurrying along, an hotel porter carrying their small baggage.

"Coming!" whispered Stainsby. He was getting so excited that he could hardly breathe the word. But he made an effort and got out two more. *"There! Now!"*

The two detectives went slowly and quietly behind Thomas Wraypoole and his companion as he reached the gangway and produced his passports. The official who examined glanced them over, glanced the man and woman over, and handed them back. And Wraypoole was signing the woman to step forward up the gangway when the elder detective tapped him on the elbow.

"Mr. Thomas Wraypoole?" he said. "Mrs. Wraypoole? Just so!—A word with you, Mr. Wraypoole, if you'll step inside a minute."

Unseen himself Stainsby was eagerly watching his old master. He saw Wraypoole turn, start, stare at the two men, and turn white to his eyes: he saw his lips open. But he saw that no sound came from them. The next sound Stainsby heard was from the elder detective as he drew Wraypoole inside the shed, close to the pile of goods behind which the apprentice was concealed.

"We're police-officers, Mr. Wraypoole, and we've a warrant for your arrest! You'd better——"

Then Stainsby heard Wraypoole's voice—angry, indignant.

“You're making a damned mistake, then! I suppose it's that Handel Street affair, but——”

Another voice broke in on his own, and that, to the surprise of Stainsby who had no idea that he was at hand, was Wedgwood's—sharp, decisive.

“We're not dealing with murder—at present, Wraypoole!” he said. “I want you for forgery!”

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE ADMISSION

From that moment the insatiable curiosity of the apprentice, unwillingly concealing himself behind the pile of merchandise, was doomed to disappointment; the chief actors in the scene followed at a little distance by the wondering porter who carried the light luggage and watched speculatively by another in charge of their cabin trunks, moved further into the shed to a more private position, and beyond Stainsby's straining ears. He saw exchange of words, gestures, and for a time gathered nothing. But there where the detectives were grouped with their captives strange things were happening.

In the course of his professional career Wedgwood had often been suddenly surprised himself and had just as often seen surprise expressed on the faces of other people. But, much to his astonishment, he had hardly uttered the word *forgery* when he saw a surprise in Thomas Wraypoole's expression which he knew, beyond doubt, to be genuine. Wraypoole, indeed, laughed—and the laugh was a sneer.

"Forgery?" he exclaimed. "And whose name have I forged? Not yours, I'll warrant!"

Wedgwood gave him a keen look and Wraypoole laughed again—this time with obvious contempt.

"Off it again, Wedgwood!" he exclaimed sarcastically. "And worse than ever, this time!"

"We'll see about that!" said Wedgwood. "Step further this way—I don't want a scene."

"No time to step that way," retorted Wraypoole. "My wife and I are going on that boat! There's all our luggage——"

"You're not going on that boat!" interrupted Wedgwood firmly. "You're going back to London with me! If you'd been on that boat—if you'd got off on it—you'd have been held on arrival at New York. I want you on a charge of forging the verification form of these passports you've just shown. What do you say to that, now?"

But as he snapped out this sharp and direct question Wedgwood had an uncomfortable feeling that he was on some wrong tack. If Wraypoole had looked genuinely surprised a minute before he now looked genuinely incredulous. What was more, the woman at his side who up to now had remained silent, gazing anxiously from one man to the other let out an equally

incredulous exclamation: evidently she knew what the detective was talking about and knew he was wrong.

"That's utter nonsense!" retorted Wraypoole. "The verification forms were properly signed by Mr. Morgan Pugh, a solicitor near my old place in Wandsworth Road—my wife and I were present, of course, when he signed them. We went to him because he was close by. What's more, I've his receipt in my pocket for the fee I paid him." He set down a small handbag and after some rummaging in a breast pocket, found a paper and handed it to the detective. "There you are!" he said triumphantly. "What about that?"

"Wedgwood looked closely at the signature of the receipt—which was certainly on Morgan Pugh's notepaper. The signature coincided with that he had seen at the Passport Office, but not with that of the Morgan Pugh he had visited.

"What was this Morgan Pugh like that you saw?" he asked, handing the receipt back. "Describe him!"

"Man about thirty—tallish—slight beard and moustache," answered Wraypoole, promptly.

"A yellowish beard and moustache," corrected Mrs. Wraypoole. "And blue eyes!"

"Had you ever seen him before?" asked

Wedgwood. "Ever done business with him?"

"No!" answered Wraypoole. "Never been there before, never set eyes on him before, though he was so near by. My regular solicitors are in the City. I went to this man because I knew that any solicitor would do——"

Wedgwood stopped him. He already had an idea. Somebody—probably a temporary clerk—had personated the real Morgan Pugh, put Wraypoole's money in his pocket, and said nothing about it. But he saw how he could turn this affair to important advantage.

"Come aside, Wraypoole," he said. "Now," he went on, as he drew his man a little way from the others, "I think there has been a mistake—it strikes me the man you saw was not Morgan Pugh at all, but some clerk or other solicitor doing duty for him. Still, I've only your word for it—and there's this warrant! Where are you off to, Wraypoole, and why?"

"New York first—then the Argentine—oil business!" answered Wraypoole. "And it's a bit of a honeymoon—she was my housekeeper; we were married a week ago. I can give you my New York address."

He thrust a card into the detective's hand, and Wedgwood suddenly made up his mind.

"Look here!" he said. "I've been making enquiries about you because your movements

have been, to say the least of them, suspicious. But you answer me two questions, truthfully and promptly, and I'll make it right about that warrant instead of detaining you till I've enquired into the Pugh business. First, from whom did that cheque for five thousand pounds come that you had specially cleared at your bank the other day?"

"From a City firm, Ledsham, Castleford and Company, who—secretly, mind you—are going into this oil business with me," replied Wraypoole, promptly. "Their place is in Queen Victoria Street."

"Very well!" said Wedgwood. "Now the other—and most important! Who was the man you saw John with the evening of the murder? Come now!"

Wraypoole hesitated. Then he caught sight of his wife's agitated face.

"Well, I'll tell you!" he said, suddenly. "But I don't believe he'd anything to do with it. A man named Levigne, a financial chap, who has an office not far from where they were talking, top of Chancery Lane."

"You mean Levigne who's a director of that new Mortover Main Colliery Company?" said Wedgwood. "Lives in Cleveland Square?"

"That's the man! But——"

Wedgwood motioned him to join his wife.

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"All right, Wraypoole!" he said. "You should have told me that before! Off you go—you've a quarter of an hour left. And—if your evidence is wanted you'll come across!"

A moment later the inquisitive apprentice saw Wraypoole and his wife actually shake hands with the three detectives, Wedgwood making some evidently humorous remark in the process and hurry with their belongings to the steamer, where they were speedily swallowed up amongst a crowd of fellow-passengers. And stealing out of his hiding-place he made his way to where Wedgwood and the other men were talking, and pulled Wedgwood's sleeve.

"What's that mean?" he demanded. "You've not let them go?"

Wedgwood looked round. He had forgotten Stainsby.

"Been a slight mistake, my lad!" he said. "Never mind—I've got the most valuable bit of information I've had since I started on this business!" He rubbed his hands at the thought of it. "Come on!" he said. "We're just going to have a cup of tea together before I get off to London again—you'll be coming with me, of course."

Stainsby gave another glance at the long,

black hull of the liner. There had been no grand dramatic scene, after all!

"I don't understand!" he growled.

"Daresay you don't my lad!" chuckled Wedgwood, who seemed to be in great good humour and immensely pleased with himself.

"But you will—you will in time!"

The apprentice followed unwillingly and sat glowering and gumpy while the three detectives chatted and gossiped over their tea. And when later he and Wedgwood boarded the train for London and Wedgwood explained what had taken place with Wraypoole on the landing-stage he shook his head disapprovingly.

"I suppose you know your job better than I do, Mr. Wedgwood!" he muttered. "But I wouldn't have believed a word Thomas Wraypoole said. I should say he stuck Mr. Morgan Pugh's name in those papers himself!"

"Mr. Pugh can settle that matter, my lad," replied Wedgwood. "To-morrow, or next day, or the day after—I'm not particular about that, or when! I got a bit of information from Wraypoole that'll probably help me more than anything I've had so far, and I shouldn't have got it if I hadn't put him in a bit of a temporary fix. But I feel sure my notion's right—Wraypoole didn't see Pugh about these verifications; he saw some man who was deputising for Pugh,

and who, knowing that Wraypoole was off, put Wraypoole's money in his pocket, see?"

"So Wraypoole's suspected no longer?" suggested Stainsby.

"I think we can dismiss him!" assented Wedgwood.

"Who's suspected now, then?" demanded the apprentice.

But Wedgwood only laughed. Stainsby had been useful enough, and he should have his reward, but there was no reason why he should be taken into full confidence. For now, consequent on Thomas Wraypoole's tardy admission Wedgwood thought he saw daylight.

Levigne! That, in all probability, was the man he wanted to get hold of—not, perhaps for actual guilt as regards the murder of John Wraypoole, but as one who knew the real truth in the case and could point to the murderer. From an early stage of his investigations, Wedgwood had felt that there was somebody in the background, accessory before or after the crime who could tell a great deal if he or she would, and he had an instinctive feeling now, after Thomas Wraypoole's reluctant admission that Levigne was the man. Levigne was closely concerned with the affairs of the newly-found colliery company; it was he who had negotiated the sale of the Mortover estate to that com-

pany; in all likelihood he had a big financial stake in these transactions; possibly he had discovered that John Wraypoole's discoveries about Avice Mortover were likely to jeopardize his position. Anyway, Levigne was the man to go for next. And though it was half-past eight in the evening when Wedgwood got back to London, he parted from his still dissatisfied companion, and hurrying straight from Waterloo to Bayswater, knocked at the door of 581 Cleveland Square, soon after nine o'clock.

For some time nobody answered the detective's summons. While he waited he examined the exterior of the house. It was typical of the houses of that neighbourhood; a stuccoed or painted front, high, narrow, with a portico over the steps of the front door and a railing that shut off the area in front of the basement. He noticed at once that all the front windows were dark; there was not a gleam of light in either upper or lower windows, nor behind the glass panels of the door at which he waited. But looking more closely he saw that there was certainly a light in the basement, and at that he knocked more loudly, and discovering a bell at the side of the door gave it a good pull. A moment later he heard a key turn and a bolt withdrawn; a light was turned up in the hall, and the door opening he found himself in the

presence of a young woman dressed as if for going out who stared at him with what he took for suspicion.

"Mr. Levigne at home?" asked Wedgwood promptly. "This is Mr. Levigne's, I think?" The young woman, who had only opened the door sufficiently to reveal her own presence, shook her head, making as if to close it altogether.

"It's Mr. Levigne's, yes," she replied. "But he's not at home."

"Can you tell me what time he's likely to be in?" asked Wedgwood. "I want to see him to-night, particularly."

"I can't say," she answered. "He mightn't be in to-night. Mr. Levigne's often away on business."

"Can you tell me if I should be likely to find him at his office, in Chancery Lane, to-morrow morning?" enquired the detective. "The matter is important."

The young woman shook her head; Wedgwood saw that she knew nothing about Chancery Lane in relation to Levigne.

"I can't say, I'm sure," she replied. "I don't know anything about the office arrangements." She hesitated a moment, still gazing doubtfully at him. "What name shall I say?" she added.

"Thank you—it's no matter," answered Wedgwood. "I'll contrive to see Mr. Levigne elsewhere."

He lifted his hat and moved off; as he retreated he heard the door locked and bolted again. For a moment or two he lingered, wondering if it would pay him to watch the house a little? But he was already weary with a long day's work, and presently he went away, towards the Underground station at Queen's Road, intending to go home. As he walked into the booking-office he ran into Nottidge.

Nottidge was not only in a hurry, but was obviously excited. The instant he saw the detective he gripped him by the arm and drew him aside.

"The very man!" he exclaimed. "Look here, Wedgwood, I've been telephoning after you all this afternoon—couldn't get any news of you!"

"Been away," said Wedgwood. "What is it?"

"This! At noon to-day I got a letter—woman's handwriting—no signature—saying that if I'd be at the corner of Queen's Road and Westbourne Grove to-night about nine-thirty the writer would meet me and give me some information. Of course, it's about my advertisement—first result I've got!"

"So you're going to keep this appointment?" said Wedgwood.

"Of course! Look here—can't you come along? Keep me in sight, you know! And if it's something that seems really important, I'll get the person, whoever she is, to tell the two of us. Come on!"

"Yes," agreed Wedgwood. He turned down Queen's Road at Nottidge's side. "You'd better be careful about what you say, at first. If the woman—if it is a woman—knows I'm a police-officer she may be off. Say I'm a friend of yours—don't mention anything about police or detectives."

"Leave it to me!" agreed Nottidge, eagerly. "I'll work it all right!"

Near the foot of Queen's Road he went forward alone, leaving Wedgwood to follow. The detective, sauntering slowly in his rear, but carefully keeping him in sight, saw him presently joined at the corner by the young woman whom he himself had just seen at the half-opened door in Cleveland Square.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE COOK-GENERAL

From where he stood, in the shelter of a shop-door, some twenty yards away, Wedgwood was able to witness all the little details of the meeting between Nottidge and his correspondent, and he speedily became aware that the lady was somewhat shy, if not suspicious, and needed indisputable assurance of Nottidge's good faith. He saw Nottidge produce what was obviously a card-case and present a card; he witnessed certain gestures on Nottidge's part which were pantomimic of asseverations of honesty and confidence. And eventually, after an exchange of speech between the two which occupied some minutes, Nottidge led his newly-made acquaintance in the detective's direction, and Wedgwood purposely stepped into the full glare of a neighbouring lamp. But the young woman did not see him; she was giving all her attention to Nottidge.

"This is my friend," said Nottidge as they came up. "You can rely on his——"

The young woman looked up at Wedgwood, and let out a cry of dismay.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "It's—it's the man who came to our door!"

"Just to ask if Mr. Levigne was at home," said Wedgwood, reassuringly. "No harm in that, miss. I didn't know I was going to meet Mr. Nottidge then—came across him by accident, after leaving you."

Nottidge looked from one to the other, evidently mystified, and Wedgwood hastened to explain matters.

"I made a call at a house in Cleveland Square just before meeting you," he said. "This young lady opened the door. So—she recognizes me!"

"Knew you at once," agreed the young woman. She had recovered her composure by that time, and was eyeing her two companions with knowing glances. Suddenly she pointed at Wedgwood and turned to Nottidge.

"Is he—somebody you employ about that affair you've been advertising about?" she asked.

"Quite right!" replied Nottidge. "He's concerned, anyway."

She nodded as if satisfied.

"Well, of course," she said, "of course, all I want is to know that I'm safe about getting

the reward you mentioned. I don't want to give away what I know for nothing! If I tell what I can tell, I expect to be paid!"

"You need have no fear on that point," answered Nottidge hastily. "Look here—this gentleman—you may as well know it—is a famous detective, Mr. Wedgwood! He'll assure you that you can depend on me for your money."

"If the information given leads to the young lady being found," said Wedgwood. "Mr. Nottidge doesn't know yet what your information amounts to."

"Let's hear what it is," said Nottidge. He looked about him, up and down the street. "We can't stand here, out in the cold," he went on. "I noticed a better sort of saloon bar down there at the corner—let's go in there and talk. You've no objection, I suppose?" he continued, turning to the young woman. "Quite respectable, I assure you!"

The young woman replied that she had no objection to anything, as long as it was proper, and she allowed herself to be escorted into a quiet corner of a saloon lounge and to accept a glass of port, a sip or two at which loosened her tongue.

"I'd better tell you all about it," she began in a confidential whisper. "My name—which

I didn't put in my letter—is Robinson, Miss Arabella Robinson. I'm cook-general to Mr. Levigne in Cleveland Square; been there rather more than a year. It's not a difficult place, for Mr. Levigne is away from home a good deal, and there's no family beyond a lady who's his private secretary, Miss Monniment. And there's a day-woman comes to help—she comes at eight of a morning and stays till eight at night, so of course I'm not over-worked, and I've a good chance of observing things. Now, Mr. Levigne, he's one of those gentlemen that are what I call difficult to deal with! You never know when he'll be in for his dinner, or if he'll be in at all, or if he's coming home that night. Unless it's known for a fact that he's away from London, which he often is, my orders are to have dinner ready at a certain hour every night—if he comes, well, there it is; if he doesn't, well—he doesn't!”

“Trying!” said Wedgwood, sympathetically.

“Oh, it's his concern!” replied Miss Robinson. “Somebody eats what he doesn't! But I want you to understand that all the doings in that house are uncertain—I never know whether Miss Monniment will be there during the day, or whether she'll go to the City—Mr. Levigne has an office there, somewhere. Well, now, about this business that you've been advertising for

information about. I never saw the advertisement until last night, and then only by accident—it caught my eye when I was sorting out a bundle of old newspapers—or I should have written before. For I'm certain that what I have to tell relates to that!"

"I hope so!" exclaimed Nottidge. "You mean—to the missing lady?"

"That's what I do mean," assented Miss Robinson. "To her, and no other! It was this way: About a week or so ago, neither Mr. Levigne nor Miss Monniment were in to dinner one night—he'd been out all day, and she went out about six o'clock—on that occasion, to be sure, she told me there'd be nobody in to dinner, for she and Mr. Levigne were both dining out. Well, about—I'm not quite sure as to the time, but it would be between nine and ten o'clock, Mr. Levigne and Miss Monniment came home, and they brought with them a young lady——"

"What like?" demanded Nottidge impatiently. "Describe her!"

"Just what you described her like in that advertisement," replied Miss Robinson, calmly. "You hit 'em both off in that! Of course, I recognized the description of Miss Monniment and her long fur coat at once, and the young lady, too!"

"Well?" asked Nottidge. "Go on!"

"Miss Monniment came to me and said they'd been to meet Mr. Levigne's niece, and they'd brought her to stay the night, and I was to get a room ready at once. There wasn't any difficulty about that, because Mr. Levigne sometimes had gentlemen to stay there for a day or two, so we always had a room that wanted little done to it. And of course the young lady stayed.

"Did you see her?" asked Wedgwood.

"Why, of course! I saw her that night, and again in the morning."

"Did she seem willing to be there?"

"She seemed quite at home, as far as I could see. I heard her laughing and talking quite freely with Miss Monniment and Mr. Levigne."

"And you say they brought her home for the night? Do you mean that she was only there one night?"

"Only that one night! Next morning she and Miss Monniment and Mr. Levigne all had breakfast together. Then Mr. Levigne went off—to his business, I suppose. About noon Miss Monniment came to me and said that she was going away for a few days and told me to call a taxi-cab. She and the young lady went off in it. The young lady hadn't any luggage, but Miss Monniment took two suit-

cases with her. One of them was empty, by the feel of it."

"Did you hear any order given to the driver as to where he was to go?" enquired Wedgwood.

"Yes—to Whiteleys, here in Westbourne Grove."

"That would be to do some shopping for the young lady," muttered Wedgwood. "Well—have you heard or seen anything of them since?"

"No, neither! Miss Monniment has never been back, and I haven't heard Mr. Levigne mention her. He's been away a good deal—he's away now. But then, as I say, you never know where to have him. He turns up any minute."

"Should you know the driver of that taxicab if you saw him again?"

"No, I shouldn't! I didn't fetch him from a rank. He was going through the square, with his flag up. Just set somebody down, I should think."

"And you haven't the least notion, from any little thing you recollect, as to where Miss Monniment was going with the young lady nor as to where they are?" asked Wedgwood. "You didn't hear anything mentioned, or see any labels addressed, or anything of that sort?"

"No—I heard nothing and saw nothing: I've no idea where they are."

Wedgwood considered this information during a moment's silence, during which Nottidge watched him anxiously, as if wondering what conclusion he had come to.

"Do you take in the letters at Mr. Levigne's?" asked the detective, suddenly turning to Miss Robinson. "Or are they dropped into a locked box?"

"They're dropped into a box, but it isn't locked. I take them out of a morning, and at any other time, and if Mr. Levigne's at home I take them to him. If he isn't I give them to Miss Monniment—if she's in. If she isn't, they're put in Mr. Levigne's study."

"Do you know Miss Monniment's handwriting when you see it?"

"Yes, well enough!"

"Very well," said Wedgwood. "Have you seen it on any envelope since she went away—any envelope addressed to Mr. Levigne?"

"I can't say that I have," replied Miss Robinson. "I may have done, you know."

"Keep a sharp look-out for any letter in her handwriting," commanded the detective. "If you see one, note down the postmark! And then drop a card to Mr. Nottidge giving particulars of the postmark. Understand?"

"Oh, yes, I understand that!" said Miss Robinson, smiling. "Very well! You mean, if it's Manchester, I just write down Manchester; if it's Paris, I write Paris?"

"You've got it!" assented Wedgwood. "Do it at once, if you see anything from her. Now another question or two. Have you ever seen a woman named Clagne, Mrs. Clagne, at Mr. Levigne's?"

"I've never seen anybody that I know by that name," answered Miss Robinson. "There was an oldish woman came there one evening some little time ago and had dinner with Mr. Levigne and Miss Monniment—a queer-looking woman, dressed in very old-fashioned style."

"Tall, thin woman?" suggested the detective. "Dark eyes?"

"Black eyes—yellow skin—scraggy," said Miss Robinson. "Regular old witch, I thought her!"

"Well, what do you mean by some little time ago?" asked Wedgwood. "Six months? Three months?"

"All about a month—I can't say exactly. But I remember her well enough, though I don't know her name. I was in and out of the room while they were having dinner, and I couldn't keep my eyes off her—I thought I'd never seen

such an old creature! She'd a big diamond ring on her finger!"

Wedgwood felt a disposition to jump in his seat.

"A—what?" he asked.

"A ring, with a big diamond in it!" said Miss Robinson. "I noticed it, and I noticed her skinny hands and fingers—it looked queer on a hand like hers. Once, when I went into the room she'd taken it off, and Mr. Levigne was looking at it, turning it over and over in the light. 'It's very loose in the setting,' I heard him say. 'You'll be losing it if you don't have it reset. You'd better leave it with me, and let me get it done for you.'"

"Did she make any answer to that?" asked the detective.

"She said something—I don't know what."

"Did she let him keep it?"

"That I can't say, either. Dinner was just about over then, and I didn't go into the room again."

"Did she go away after dinner?"

"Not immediately after. She was for some time in Mr. Levigne's study, talking to him and Miss Monniment. She went away about ten o'clock."

"And you say that was about a month ago?"

"A month to three weeks."

“You’d know her again if you saw her?” suggested Wedgwood.

“I should think so!” agreed Miss Robinson. “Queerest old frump I ever saw in my life! I wondered what she was doing there.”

Wedgwood rose, looking at his watch. He motioned Nottidge aside, and after impressing upon him the importance of inculcating the young woman with the doctrines of privacy and perception, nodded a farewell to her and went away. For Wedgwood had made another discovery, and he wanted to think, and as he journeyed homeward he tabulated what he had got to think about.

First of all, there seemed little doubt, from the cook-general’s description of her, that the woman who had dined with Levigne and his secretary one night, three weeks or a month ago (which was about the time when Janet Clagne was visiting the Patellos at Tooting) was Janet Clagne herself. Nor was there any doubt that she was then wearing a ring in which was set a fine diamond the setting, according to Levigne, as reported by Miss Arabella Robinson, being loose. There was nothing unusual or remarkable in Janet Clagne possessing such a valuable thing—her husband, according to the Patellos, had been a jeweller: she had probably preserved the ring as a me-

mento. But now arose two immensely important questions:

1. Did Janet Clagne hand over her ring to Levigne so that he might have the diamond safely reset?

2. Was the diamond which he, Wedgwood, had picked up in Miss Tandy's room the diamond in question?

Beyond formulating these questions Wedgwood thought little more of them that night. He was wearied by his long day's labours and went quickly to bed. And before he had time to think of them next morning he found something else to think about. Almost the first thing he saw on opening his newspaper was the name *Mortover*.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE WIRE FROM NETHERWELL

Wedgwood was one of those well-regulated Englishmen who believe that if you really must read a newspaper, there is only one newspaper that can be depended upon through thick and thin—to wit, the *Times*: he would as soon have thought of beginning the day without his breakfast as of omitting to glance over the *Times* while he munched his bacon and sipped his coffee. And like all readers of newspapers he had his favourite page. Some men turn first to the political news; some to the sporting, some to the financial; Wedgwood invariably turned first to the legal. And it was as he glanced over the Law Notices for that day that he saw the name *Mortover*. There it was—he sat for a moment staring at it.

Court XXIII (Pullastone, J.), 10.30.
*Mortover v. Mortover Main Colliery
Company, Limited.* Application for
Injunction.

There was a telephone in the house in which Wedgwood lodged, and within two minutes of

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his reading that notice he was at it, ringing up Nottidge, whose number he had been careful to secure on first going to Nottidge House. Within two minutes more he was through to him.

"That you, Nottidge? This is Wedgwood! Have you seen the *Times* this morning?"

"Not yet," replied Nottidge. "What is there?"

"Look on the law page—law notices of the Courts—you'll see! Listen—no time to waste. Meet me as soon as you can outside the Law Courts—main entrance. Hurry up—it's nearly half-past nine now! Understand?"

"I'll be there—set off in five minutes," answered Nottidge.

Wedgwood rang off and hastily finishing his breakfast hurried along to the Law Courts.

It was a little after ten when he reached the main entrance, a moment later Nottidge sprang out of a taxi-cab and joined him.

"Seen it?" demanded the detective.

Nottidge waved a copy of the *Times* at him.

"I've seen it!" he answered. "What on earth is the meaning of it?"

Wedgwood drew him aside from the stream of barristers, solicitors, clerks, witnesses steadily pouring in through the archway.

"I'll tell you what the meaning is!" he said,

with a knowing look. "You can crystallize the meaning into one word—Levigne!"

But Nottidge shook his head.

"Don't understand even now!" he said. "Levigne? What's he got to do with this?"

"Everything!" said Wedgwood. "I'm beginning to see through things. Levigne was the main factor in starting that Mortover colliery scheme. He's a big stake in it. Well, at a critical stage of its affairs, when the limited liability company is being formed and shares put on the market, he finds out that there's a claimant to the land which the company has secured from the supposed legal owner, Philip Mortover. That claimant is the girl Avice Mortover! How, we don't know—but I can guess! Levigne finds out that Avice Mortover's claim is a thoroughly substantial one, not to be set aside. He decides to take up her cause, and gets her into his power—she, of course, was the young lady we heard of last night, who was brought to Cleveland Square by Levigne and his secretary, spent the night there, and was taken away, somewhere, by the secretary next morning. Why? Probably to keep her in safe hiding until these legal proceedings could be taken. Probably, too, Levigne has got her to sign papers by virtue of which, in the event of her substantiating her

claim, he'll put himself safe and right, financially. Deep and clever work, young man—but I shall have a word or two to say to Mr. Levigne as soon as I set eyes on him!"

Nottidge listened to all this with knitted brows.

"What I don't understand," he said moodily, "is how they got Miss Mortover away so willingly! Strangers to her—and yet that girl we saw last night said she seemed quite at home with them!"

"Oh, I understand that!" answered Wedgwood. "The woman probably introduced herself as a relation, and Levigne as another. They got round her with soft words, representing that they were her friends and going to see that she got her rights."

"That doesn't explain why she's never communicated with me, though!" said Nottidge. "She might at least have dropped me a line!"

Wedgwood smiled and gave his companion a shrewd glance.

"I think you'll find that she probably did drop you a line!" he said. "It's not her fault that you didn't get it!"

"What d'you mean?" asked Nottidge.

"Do you remember what the waiter, Marco, told us as regards a certain happening at Cipriani's restaurant?" asked Wedgwood. "He

said that after the gentleman and the two ladies had dined, telegram forms were asked for, and the young lady—the young lady, mind you—wrote out two telegrams. What did she do with 'em? She gave 'em to the gentleman! Now, in my opinion, you'll find out, when you meet Miss Mortover, that one of those telegrams was to you, and the other to her landlady. Of course, Levigne never handed them in—never meant to! And the probability is that while you've been wondering why you never heard from her, she's been surprised that she never heard from you!"

"Meet her again, you say!" exclaimed Nottidge. "And when's that likely to be?"

Wedgwood drew out his watch.

"I should say in a few minutes," he replied coolly. "This application's fixed for ten-thirty and it's a quarter-past ten now."

"You expect her here?" asked Nottidge.

"I expect 'em all here!" said Wedgwood. "Levigne, his secretary, Miss Mortover, and their solicitor and counsel. And now Nottidge as time's short, a word to you! You can leave Levigne to me—I'll tackle him, to some purpose. You see that very ordinary-looking individual, quietly glancing about him, over there? That's an assistant of mine—another detective—I brought him along on purpose."

"Going to arrest Levigne?" exclaimed Nottidge. "For what?"

"I said nothing about arresting him," replied Wedgwood. "But he's going with me—somewhere—to undergo some pretty stiff questioning! Never mind him—as I say, I'll see to him. But as regards Miss Mortover, a word to you! Don't let her out of your sight again, whatever happens!"

"I'll see to that!" responded Nottidge, heartily. "Only let me see her——"

Wedgwood motioned him to turn.

"You can see her now!" he said. "Here they all are—as I said, except Levigne!"

Nottidge turned sharply—to see Avice Mortover, a tall, spare woman in a long fur coat, a man who looked like a solicitor and had a clerk in attendance with a bag, and another man in a barrister's wig and gown. They were coming through the main entrance, all talking together. Wedgwood pulled Nottidge's sleeve.

"You see the little man—not the barrister," he whispered. "That's Curtoise, of Curtoise and Fullpage, Portugal Street—one of the cutest lawyers in London! I know him, and I'm going to speak to him. You make up to the girl!"

He went after the solicitor, unheeding the sudden exclamation which fell from Avice

Mortover's lips as she recognized Nottidge. Curtoise, a sharp-featured, keen-eyed man, turned quickly at Wedgwood's touch on his arm, and gave him a questioning look as he saw who it was that accosted him.

"A word—in private!" said Wedgwood. He drew the solicitor aside. "You're expecting Mr. Levigne to turn up here, I suppose, Mr. Curtoise," he went on. "Well, between you and me, I want him!"

Curtoise showed no astonishment: he was of the sort that shows no astonishment or surprise even when they are felt.

"What is it, Wedgwood?" he asked quietly.

"That Handel Street murder case," replied Wedgwood. Then he added, with a significant glance: "It's mixed up with this Mortover case more than you'd think, Mr. Curtoise! But what is this case this morning?"

"Application for an injunction to restrain the Directors of the Company from dealing further with the land and minerals," answered the solicitor. He pointed to Avise, who was now talking rapidly to Nottidge. "That girl claims the Mortover estate."

"I know!" nodded Wedgwood. "Well, I suppose Levigne's sure to come here?"

"We can't do anything if he doesn't," replied Curtoise. "Although he's employed us on Miss

Mortover's behalf, and we've instructed counsel, Levigne has all the necessary papers! He won't let them out of his keeping. We can't go on unless he's here, so he's sure to come. But—is it anything serious you're wanting him for? Some enquiry, I suppose?"

"You'll hear, in time," said Wedgwood. "Your counsel's wanting you—time to go in, I should think. There's ten-thirty."

He exchanged a word or two with his assistant and then followed Curtoise and his group into court. Nottidge came to him.

"I've had a word or two with her!" he whispered. "You were right about those telegrams! One was to me; the other to the landlady. She also says she wrote to me and gave Levigne the letter to post. She's amazed that I never got either telegram or letter; because, she says, Levigne and that secretary woman have treated her with the greatest kindness and consideration——"

"No doubt!" said Wedgwood. "*For* a consideration! Did you ask her if she's put her hand to any papers or documents while she's been with Levigne?"

"Yes! She says she's signed some papers that he put before her. She——"

"Here's the judge!" interrupted Wedgwood. "Wait a bit!"

He was looking round for Levigne. So, too, were Curtoise and the barrister, both obviously annoyed and embarrassed. Presently, on the case being called, the barrister rose, his voice full of mournful apology and explained that he was in a difficulty; certain absolutely necessary papers which were to have been brought up from Derbyshire last night had not arrived, though it was possible—indeed, fully expected—that the person who was bringing them might arrive at any moment. If his lordship would be so indulgent as to——

“Better take the next case and defer your application until this afternoon,” interrupted the judge.

“If your lordship pleases!” murmured the barrister, and sinking into his seat, turned a reproachfully expectant eye on the door. Wedgwood’s eye followed his, but he saw no sign of Levigne, and presently he made his way to Curtoise’s side in the well of the court.

“Was it Levigne who was to bring up those papers from Derbyshire?” he asked, under cover of the beginning of the next case.

“Yes!” replied Curtoise. “He should have been at my office with them first thing this morning.”

“Papers relating to the colliery?” persisted Wedgwood.

"Papers relating to this application," said Curtoise. "Certain signatures. And pray how does all this relate to your affair?"

"I told you the two things were mixed up more than you'd think," replied Wedgwood. "You'll know all about it before long. Well, I wonder if Levigne's coming?"

"I wired to Mortover Grange this morning to know if he'd set off," said Curtoise. "A reply hadn't come when I left the office—I'm expecting it here any minute."

Wedgwood stole away—but only as far as to the side of Avice Mortover, who sat by Miss Monniment.

"A word with you, young lady!" he whispered with a smile. "Glad to see you're no worse for your adventures. Listen—you remember coming to see me about John Wraypoole? Of course! Well, now, did you ever, at any time, give John Wraypoole any papers relating to yourself or your father and mother? Be sure!"

Avice Mortover leaned nearer to him and whispered.

"Yes, I gave him some birth and marriage certificates that I kept in an envelope," she answered. "He was to look them over and give them back. But he didn't—I've never seen them since."

"Have you told anyone of them?" asked Wedgwood.

"Mr. Levigne. He asked me questions about them, but I couldn't remember anything. They were papers that my mother kept, and, of course, when she died, I got them."

"You don't know where Mr. Levigne is this morning, I suppose?" enquired Wedgwood.

"No—I don't know anything about it. I've come here from Brighton—Miss Monniment and I have been there for some days. Mr. Levigne was down there a few days ago, and he told me he was going to Derbyshire again, but——"

At that moment Wedgwood saw a clerk glide up to Curtoise's side and hand him a telegram; a second or two later Curtoise motioned the detective to join him. He thrust the telegram into his hand.

"Look at that!" he whispered. "Queer!" Wedgwood read the message rapidly.

"Mr. Levigne was here yesterday. Left five o'clock in afternoon with Mrs. Clagne. They were expected back at seven, but never returned. If you are Mr. Levigne's solicitors, please come. There is something wrong here.

M. PATELLO."

"What do you make of that?" whispered Curtoise. "Who's the sender?"

"I know," answered Wedgwood. "A young woman staying at Mortover Grange. What shall you do?"

"Hard to say," replied the solicitor. "The strange thing is, there's no communication from Levigne himself!"

"Just so!" agreed Wedgwood. He rose quietly, preparing to slip noiselessly away. "I'm off!" he whispered with a nod.

"Where?" asked Curtoise. "Not——?"

"There!" answered Wedgwood. "Mortover Grange!"

He hastened into the street, hailed a taxi-cab, and bade its driver hurry to St. Pancras. And as his cab drew up, another cab came alongside, and from it descended Mr. and Mrs. Patello.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

FAMILY HISTORY

It needed but one glance at the faces of Mr. Patello and his wife to convince Wedgwood that they were there on some urgent business, and at the nature of that business he made a shrewd guess. Before they had dismissed their cab-driver he was at their side: Mr. Patello stared at sight of him, Mrs. Patello let out an exclamation which showed her sharpness of perception.

"Mr. Wedgwood? You're surely never going where we are—to Netherwell?" she gasped. Then before he could answer, she gripped his arm. "You've heard something?" she said. "Bad news?"

"Can't say if it's bad news or not, Mrs. Patello," replied the detective. "I've just seen a telegram from your daughter at Mortover Grange. She wires that strange things are happening there. And so—I'm going there! And I suppose you are?"

"We've had a telegram from Mattie, too," said Mrs. Patello. "It came an hour ago. She begged us to go there at once——"

"Show it to him," interrupted Mr. Patello.

Wedgwood glanced quickly at the crumpled message which Mrs. Patello produced from her bag. He noticed that it had been sent off from Netherwell at half-past eight that morning.

Do please come here at once something wrong here frightened to stay come immediately Mattie.

"What can you make of it, Mr. Wedgwood?" asked Mrs. Patello anxiously. "Was there more in the telegram you saw just now?"

"No!" replied Wedgwood. "Practically the same. You're doing right in going down there."

"Such a way to go, and such a time to wait!" sighed Mrs. Patello. "We set off at once, but now there isn't a train till twelve twenty-five—twenty minutes yet. And the uncertainty—who knows what mayn't be happening!"

"Who was the telegram sent to that you saw, sir?" asked Mr. Patello. "I wasn't aware that my daughter knew anybody in your line."

"It was to a solicitor, Mr. Patello," replied Wedgwood. "Mr. Curtoise, of Portugal Street. He wired to Mortover Grange this morning enquiring about a Mr. Levigne, whose name you may have heard before. Your daughter answered the wire. She said that Mr. Levigne

who was at Mortover Grange yesterday left there at five o'clock yesterday afternoon in company with Mrs. Clagne and that they were to have returned at seven. They hadn't returned when she wired this morning, and she asked Mr. Curtoise if he was Mr. Levigne's solicitor to go down there, as strange things were happening."

"Is he going, then?" asked Mrs. Patello.

"I don't know. But I am," said Wedgwood. "We'll go down together. Something's going on there that seems to have upset your daughter. This Mr. Levigne, now—do you know anything of him?"

"I've heard his name from my sister, Mrs. Clagne," replied Mrs. Patello. "He's a London man that has something to do with this colliery business. I know my sister went to see him about it one night when she was staying with us."

"He's a director," said Mr. Patello. He glanced about him with a dismal, woe-begone expression. "It's to be hoped there's nothing gone wrong about that colliery!" he added, mournfully. "When one's got money in a thing——"

"No use anticipating evil," said Wedgwood. "I don't think we shall find it's that. And it's very evident your daughter was all right this

morning, or she couldn't have sent off those telegrams."

"What do you think it can be, then?" asked Mrs. Patello. "Mattie's a sensible girl, Mr. Wedgwood, and she wouldn't send for us like that unless there was a reason."

But Wedgwood refrained from expressing an opinion, though he was not without one. He suggested that they should get their tickets and find a comfortable place in the train; after all, he pointed out, Mr. and Mrs. Patello were doing all they could in responding so promptly to their daughter's summons. He himself, having found his companions quiet quarters went into a smoking-compartment close by, to think. And one result of his cogitations was that when the journey was half accomplished he went back to Mr. and Mrs. Patello. Mr. Patello was asleep in one corner; Mrs. Patello sat, still anxious and thoughtful, in another: Wedgwood sat down by her.

"I want to ask you a question, Mrs. Patello," he said. "Just a little matter that's crossed my mind. Does your sister possess a valuable diamond ring?"

Mrs. Patello started, staring at her questioner.

"Well, now, however could you know that?"

she exclaimed. "To be sure, she does—a very valuable one!"

"Heirloom, perhaps?" suggested Wedgwood.

"Well, it was left her by her husband, Mr. Clagne," replied Mrs. Patello. "Clagne, he was a jeweller, and in a very nice way of business, too, when he died. He died very suddenly, did Clagne, but of course Janet got all he had, I've heard that Clagne got that diamond ring a bargain; he always wore it himself while he lived, and when he died Janet took to wearing it herself, though it's a gentleman's ring. Of course, she only wears it on special occasions. Now how did you come to know about it?"

"Oh, I've just heard that she had one," replied Wedgwood, with affected carelessness. "I suppose she had it on her finger when she came to stay with you a short time ago?"

"She had—and I gave her a warning about it," replied Mrs. Patello. "The stone had got loose in its setting. 'You'll be losing that, Janet,' I said. 'You take my advice and get it reset.' It was quite wobbly, you see—seemed to me as if it might slip out any minute. And that would have been a fine loss!"

"Did she take your advice?" asked Wedgwood.

"I don't know—I can't remember seeing her wearing it after that," answered Mrs. Patello.

"But she's the sort of woman who wouldn't tell you if she did take your advice about anything. Close! She may have taken it to get reset while she was in London, of course."

"Not many jewellers knocking around in the Mortover Grange neighbourhood, to be sure!" remarked Wedgwood. "Mrs. Clagne's been at the Grange a long time, hasn't she?"

"A great many years," assented Mrs. Patello. "You might say, indeed, that she's one of the family, she's been so bound up in it. There were reasons. You see, just about the time that Janet lost her husband, Stephen Mortover lost his wife; they died, Clagne and Mrs. Stephen, within a few weeks of each other. And both Stephen and Janet were left with small children to bring up—Stephen had a boy, this present young Philip, and Janet had a boy, Walter. They were both about the same age, those two children. Well, now, Stephen, he was a shiftless sort of man; no good at all, and certainly not fit to bring up a motherless infant. So Janet took Philip away with her to where she was then living so that she could bring him up with her own boy. So, of course, she's been his foster-mother all his life."

"Where is her own son, then?" asked Wedgwood. This family history, not at all pertinent

at first, was beginning to interest him. "Isn't he living?"

"No, he died, poor child, at a very early age," replied Mrs. Patello. "In fact, very soon after she took young Philip to live with them. Croup it was—went very sudden. Of course, I'd left those parts then—I never saw him, except when he was a mere one-month's baby: I only heard of these things. But Janet said he was a fine little fellow. To be sure, croup makes very short work of young children!"

"So I understand," said Wedgwod. "So I suppose she kept young Philip with her?"

"Never left her—or she never left him," assented Mrs. Patello. "He lived with her until he was several years old; then she went to become housekeeper at Mortover Grange, and of course he went back there with her. They've never been parted, those two."

Wedgwood remained silent awhile, following out a train of thought.

"How old was that child when he died—the child Walter?" he asked suddenly.

"Fifteen months," replied Mrs. Patello. "Sad age—just when they get interesting!"

"And Philip—how old was he?"

"Same age, almost to a day. I never saw him—at that time, I mean—but I've heard that the two boys were as like as two peas!" con-

tinued Mrs. Patello, becoming sentimentally reminiscent. "Might have been twin-brothers, I was told!"

"And now your sister wants young Philip Mortover to marry your daughter?" asked Wedgwood. "Family arrangement, eh?"

"It's been discussed, between us, Mr. Wedgwood—and of course, as things have turned out, it would be a good match for Mattie, as far as money's concerned. But now there's the question of this girl who claims to be Matthew Mortover's daughter! How is that matter going, Mr. Wedgwood?"

"I may be better able to tell you more about that, Mrs. Patello, if and when I get hold of this man Levigne," replied the detective. "I fancy he's in possession of information that I should like to get! Papers!"

"And you think he's down at Mortover Grange?" asked Mrs. Patello.

"I think so! I think your daughter's wire to the solicitors implied that he's there."

"Well, I wish we were there!" sighed Mrs. Patello. "I'm that anxious about Mattie——"

Wedgwood pointed to the scene outside the carriage windows.

"Don't be surprised if we're delayed," he said. "There's evidently been a lot of snow here, and we're still south of Derby. What it

may be like north of it, and in those valleys we're going to, I can't guess. It's a wild, savage country that, Mrs. Patello—striking enough in spring, summer and autumn, but in winter—ah! I don't relish facing the last bit of our journey."

"Well, I wish we were there!" repeated Mrs. Patello. "When one's anxious——"

But the getting there was not to be as speedy as Mrs. Patello could have wished. The express was late at Derby: the local train to Netherwell was nearly an hour late in starting; it was twice held up in its journey through the wild country which it had to traverse, and the evening had set in and darkness long fallen when Wedgwood and his companions, starved to their bones, turned out at Netherwell amidst what seemed to be a world of snow.

"You'll not get any conveyance of any sort to take you that way to-night, sir!" said a porter of whom Wedgwood enquired as to means of getting to Mortover Grange. "I don't think anything could get through! It's been snowing like this, and sometimes worse, ever since noon yesterday—thirty hours continuous, now—and they say those roads up Mortover way are ever so many feet deep! There's been no cabs, traps, or anything of that sort here all day long."

Wedgwood glanced in the light of the feeble lamps at his two companions.

"We must get there!" said Mrs. Patello. "If I have to walk, I must get there!"

"I'm afraid you couldn't walk, m'm," answered the porter. "Wildest part of all this country is that! And it's nearer four miles than three."

"We'll go down to the hotel," said Wedgwood. "They may be able to suggest something there."

The boots at the hotel remembered Wedgwood and welcomed the sight of him again. But he shook his head when sounded on the chance of getting a conveyance. Impossible! he said, to get to Mortover Grange on a night and in a storm like that; he, like the porter, had heard that the valley roads were choked with snow. Still, if it was as imperative as all that, he'd do his best. And Wedgwood, counselling Mr. and Mrs. Patello to thaw themselves and get some refreshment while they waited, installed them by the coffee-room fire, and left them for the smoking-room, where the young lady behind the bar was as quick to recognize him as the boots had been. The detective, over a glass of whisky, chatted to her awhile about the weather they had had up there since his previous visit, and quietly led the way to a

question—had Mr. Levigne been there again lately?

“He was in here yesterday morning, fairly early,” she answered. “Before this snow started. Come from London by a very early train, I think.”

“Staying here, then?” asked Wedgwood.

“No, he’s not staying here, this time,” replied the barmaid. “He only came in for a few minutes, to have a drink. He’d a cab waiting for him at the door—going to the colliery, I suppose.”

Wedgwood presently left the hotel and made his way to the police-superintendent who started at sight of him.

“Hullo!” he exclaimed. “I was just thinking of you! I say—I believe there’s something wrong over there at Mortover Grange. You heard anything—is that what brings you down this awful weather?”

“What have you heard?” demanded Wedgwood.

“Just this! A man—a cattle-drover—came here about four o’clock and said he’d come from that direction, and as he passed Mortover Grange a girl came out to him and asked him if he was going to Netherwell if he’d tell the police that Mrs. Clagne, Mr. Mortover and Mr. Levigne all went out from there late yesterday

afternoon and had never come back. That's all."

"Have you sent over?" asked Wedgwood.

"In this storm? Impossible! The roads are blocked!" said the superintendent.

"I'm going!" said Wedgwood. "That's what I've come for!"

He lingered a few minutes, discussing matters, and then hurried back to the hotel. The boots had found a man, owner of a cab and two stout horses, who would do his best to get the party as far as he could along the road, but couldn't promise to reach Mortover. And presently Wedgwood and his companions set off, and for two hours floundered through the drifting snow. In the end they had to walk, half-buried at every step, and the evening was merging into night when at last Wedgwood discovered the gate of Mortover Grange and saw the old house against the sky, but all in darkness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE DARK HOUSE

The masses and drifts of snow in the courtyard were so deep, and the darkness was so thick that it was only by straining his recollection of the place that Wedgwood contrived, with great difficulty, to guide his bewildered companions to the stone porch. That, too, was filled with snow, and it was evident that no attempt had been made to clear it. Knowing no other entrance to the house he was obliged to force a way through the congregated mass to the door within—repeated knockings on that failed to produce any answer. Minutes went by; Mrs. Patello began to protest that she could bear the exposure no longer; Mr. Patello suggested they should seek the rear of the house. But just then Wedgwood was aware of a voice on the other side of the door, faintly enquiring who was there—Mrs. Patello revived.

“That’s Mattie!” she exclaimed. “Oh, tell her to let us in!”

“Your father and mother!” shouted Wedgwood. “Open the door!”

The undoing of bolts, the turning of keys took

some time; the door, opened at last, revealed Mattie Patello, huddled in various odd garments, a candle in one hand, relieved yet bearing plain evidences of fright and misery.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come!" she said. "There isn't a soul in this awful place but me—I've never seen anybody to speak to since the postman and a telegraph boy were here this morning, and I've been all alone in the house since yesterday afternoon. I've been frightened to death"—she broke off short, staring at Wedgwood. "I've seen you here before!" she exclaimed. "You're the man that made a picture——"

"All right, my girl!" interrupted Wedgwood. "Your father and mother know me! Now—is there a fire anywhere?"

"There's a big fire in the kitchen," answered Mattie. "It's never been out since yesterday. I sat up by it all last night, and I was going to sit up by it again—I'm terrified to go to bed. I think I'd have gone mad to-night if you hadn't come—you've no idea what it's been like!"

"Well, we're here now," said Wedgwood. "See to your mother—she must be wet through. Let's get dry and warm and we'll hear all about it. One word, though—you've not seen or heard anything of those three since last night?"

“Neither seen nor heard!” the girl answered. “They went—and they’ve never been back!”

Wedgwood turned and fastened the door again with his own hands, before following Mattie and her father and mother into a great kitchen, where a fire of logs roared up the chimney. And then he proved himself a practical man by making immediate preparations for food and drink—he had taken the precaution to bring a couple of bottles of whisky with him from the hotel at Netherwell, and he lost no time in administering liberal doses of it to his companions and himself—not before there was dire need, for Mrs. Patello was on the verge of exhaustion, and Mr. Patello was speechless with cold, and it was some time before either was in a fit state to hear any account of their daughter’s doings. Wedgwood was in no hurry about that—he knew that nothing could be done while that storm lasted; he knew, too, that there was no chance whatever of either Levigne, or Janet Clagne, or Philip Mortover coming back that night. And he waited for news until his two companions had revived and become gradually thawed by the big fire: then he quietly asked Mattie to tell what had happened.

Mattie Patello was obviously as anxious to talk as Wedgwood—secretly—was to listen.

She had been bottling things up all day; the detective was quick to notice the relief it gave her to let out the accumulated flood.

"If I'd known what I know now I'd never have come into this house!" she exclaimed. "There's something wrong here, mother, whether you know it or not! Aunt Janet—she's queer! I've seen it ever since I came, but yesterday—I don't know what you'd have done if you had had to go through yesterday and to-day!"

"Tell us about yesterday," suggested Wedgwood. "What happened?"

"It began in the morning," continued Mattie. "Mr. Levigne—he's a man from London that has something to do with the new colliery, and he's been here once or twice before since I came—came here just before noon. He came in a cab from Netherwell, just about when the snow-storm was starting, and sent the cab away. He and Aunt Janet had some talk before dinner, in the little parlour, and at dinner she was in a very bad temper. After dinner she got me to wash up for her, and she and Mr. Levigne were in the little parlour again, and I could hear that they were quarrelling—at high words. I didn't hear anything of what they said, but you could tell they were quarrelling. Once I had to go into the little parlour—a man had come to the

door who wanted something and I had to see her about it. She and Mr. Levigne were at opposite sides of the table, with a lot of papers between them, and she looked as black as thunder and he looked vexed. She packed me out, pretty sharp, and I took good care not to go near them again, but I could hear them at it, hammer and tongs, all the afternoon—she was shouting at him sometimes.”

“You never heard anything she said?” asked Wedgwood.

“Only once—when I was passing the door. I heard her say ‘It’s all in her interest—all in her interest’—just like that. Of course, I didn’t know what she meant.”

“Did you hear Mr. Levigne make any reply?” asked Wedgwood.

“I heard him speak, but I couldn’t distinguish anything. It wasn’t Mr. Levigne who seemed to be quarrelling so much as Aunt Janet. He spoke as if he was trying to smooth her down, softly, like. It was she who did the loud talking—she seemed to be furious with him about something.”

“And you say it went on all the afternoon?” enquired Wedgwood.

“Till past four o’clock, anyway,” replied Mattie. “We had tea, then—I had to get it ready. Aunt Janet was sulkier than ever at

tea—she wouldn't speak to anybody. And she looked—my, I never saw her look so angry!”

“Where was Philip Mortover while all this was going on?” asked the detective.

“Out! He'd gone out with his gun, in the morning, before Mr. Levigne came, and he didn't come in to dinner—he never came in till tea-time. I believe he'd been drinking.”

Mr. Patello made an inarticulate sound; Mrs. Patello an incredulous one.

“Oh, Mattie, you don't mean to say he's that sort?” she exclaimed. “Your Aunt Janet never mentioned——”

“He does drink!” asserted Mattie. “He goes off, I don't know where, and drinks. He and Aunt Janet have rows about it. But he does! And I wouldn't marry him if he'd a million times as much money as you and Aunt Janet say he has—all I want is to get out of this and never see place or people again—it's a perfect nightmare!”

“Well—what about when he came in?” asked Wedgwood. “What happened?”

“Nothing!” replied Mattie. “He seemed grumpy—surly, you know. But he's always like that—I hate him!”

“Was there any talk between him and Levigne and Mrs. Clagne?” asked Wedgwood.

"No—he talked a bit to Mr. Levigne when we were having tea, but only about shooting."

"What happened after that?"

"Well, after tea, Philip went off to a room where he keeps his guns, and Aunt Janet asked me to wash up the tea-things. She and Mr. Levigne began talking again. I heard him say 'You may as well make up your mind—there's nothing else for it.' I didn't hear what she said to that, but after a while she went upstairs and came down again dressed to go out. She and Mr. Levigne went out—she said to me that they'd be back at eight o'clock, and that if a cab came for him, the man was to wait."

"You don't know where they went?" asked Wedgwood.

"No—she didn't say. And I couldn't see which way they went, because it was just then that the snow-storm began to get really bad; it hadn't been anything much until then. Besides that was five o'clock, and dark."

"Where could they go?" asked Wedgwood. "There's nowhere to go to, about here, is there?"

"There are two or three houses—farm-houses—not so very far off," replied Mattie. "And there's a new house been built near the colliery, where the manager, Mr. Malcolmson,

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lives, and there are cottages, too. I thought, perhaps, they'd gone to Mr. Malcolmson's."

"Well—and what about Philip Mortover? He went out, too, didn't he?"

"Yes, and not so long after they'd gone! He came in here, into this kitchen, and went to that cupboard in the corner. There's whisky and other stuff in there, but Aunt Janet had locked it up just before she went out and had put the key in her pocket—I saw her. When he found he couldn't get in, he swore awfully, and then he went and put on his leggings and a big coat and went off."

"Where's the nearest public-house?" asked Wedgwood.

"It's a good mile away, on the high-road between Harslow and Ruxton—the Drovers' Arms," replied Mattie. "High up on the moors—an awful wild spot. But there's a short cut from here. Then there's another between here and Netherwell—the Coach and Four. But that's further off."

"Well—so you were left alone?"

"Yes, and I didn't like it! There's noises in this old house when you're alone in it—queer noises—didn't I hear them, last night! However, I wasn't so frightened until eight o'clock came and went. They didn't come, and didn't come! And the man who was to come with the

cab never came. I wasn't surprised at that—I could see from the windows that the snow was awful. And Philip didn't come—I was glad he didn't. And of course, none of them came back—I sat by this fire all night, all alone!"

Mrs. Patello made a moan of commiseration; Mr. Patello shook his head. And Mattie went on with her story.

"The postman managed to get through, on his pony, this morning," she said. "I told him about it, and I sent that telegram home. I'd have set off home myself there and then, but I hadn't enough money. Then, later on, a telegram came asking about Mr. Levigne, and I sent a reply to it. But nobody else came, and I heard nothing of Aunt Janet, or Philip, or Mr. Levigne. Then during the afternoon I saw a man struggling through the snow towards Netherwell, and I managed to get out to the gate to him and asked him to tell the police about those three. And after that—well, there was nothing happened until I heard you knock!"

Wedgwood persuaded Mrs. Patello and her daughter to go to bed; when they had followed his advice he turned to Mr. Patello. But Mr. Patello, wearied out, had fallen fast asleep on an old couch drawn up by the fireside, and the detective, throwing a rug over him, made up the

fire and sat by it, musing over the events of the day and speculating on the probabilities of the story he had just listened to. Trying as that day had been he had no desire for sleep; his brain was actively at work on the problems that still required solution. He thought little about the disappearance of Philip Mortover—Philip, in his opinion, had made off to one of the adjacent inns on finding the cupboard locked and the key taken away, and there he had stayed and would probably be found. But the whereabouts of Levigne and Janet Clagne was a different matter. For he had learned enough by that time to know that there was a secret, dark and mysterious, between those two, and that whatever they were engaged in bore some sinister relationship to it.

Dark and mysterious—it struck him as he sat there by the blazing fire that everything about that old house, set there in the midst of the whirling snow, was as mysterious as it was dark. It was a place of secrets—and it looked it. He glanced around him at the queer and quaint quarters into which he and his companions had been so thankful to get—at the wide fireplace, with its ingle-nooks and black cavities; at the raftered roof; the ancient furniture, every stick of which he guaranteed to be two or three hundred years old, at least; at the

slowly-ticking grandfather clock, bearing on its face the date 1720; at the various nooks and corners; at the old glass, china, pewter ranged in rows in the presses—it had an atmosphere of its own, that place, he thought, and he wouldn't have been surprised if he had suddenly seen it filled with the ghosts of long dead Mortovers. Many and many a Mortover must have sat in the very chair in which he sat now, stretching legs and feet to just such a blaze as that now roaring up the wide chimney; many a Mortover woman of bygone generations had doubtless kept vigil in that kitchen as the Pательlo girl had kept vigil the previous night. An eerie, creepy place. . . .

Wedgwood got up from his chair after a while, and pipe in mouth and hands in pockets began to examine the queer old objects by which he was surrounded. It was plain that the place was used, and had long been used, as a family living-room as well as a kitchen and there were all sorts of things in it that are not usually found in kitchens—an ancient spinet, framed pictures and samplers on the walls, a fine old bureau, a corner cupboard filled with tarnished silver, and, in a recess let deep into the wall, a pile of old, leather-bound books, folios, quartos, octavos the very sight of which was enough to make a bibliophile's mouth

water. And Wedgwood was a bit of a book-lover, and he began to examine them, and finding one heavy volume to be in black leather, carried it over to the fireside for closer inspection. It proved to be a volume of Elizabethan travels, liberally furnished with charts and maps—unfolding one of these, a loose paper slipped out and fluttered to his feet—a paper in modern handwriting. He picked it up, and with a sudden gasp of astonishment, read the first few words:

*This is the last Will and testament of me,
Gilson Mortover. . . .*

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE CLAGNE BIRTHMARK

In the course of his professional experiences, Wedgwood had more than once made a surprising discovery, but he had never previously discovered a missing will. Having some knowledge of legal matters, picked up by observation and enquiry, he hastened to assure himself that the document in his hands had been properly executed. As far as he could see, it seemed to be in order—there was the signature of the testator and there were the signatures of the two necessary witnesses. Certain peculiarities struck him at once. This was a holograph will—written out by Gilson Mortover himself, in an old-fashioned, crabbed handwriting; from the style of their caligraphy the two witnesses were probably labourers on the farm. But it was all done correctly: it could stand, as the saying goes. And Wedgwood had mastered its brief contents in another glance: Gilson Mortover had disposed of his property in one short sentence.

*I leave everything of which I die possessed
in equal shares to my two sons Matthew Mort-*

over and Stephen Mortover and I appoint them joint executors of this my will.

That was plain enough, thought Wedgwood—whatever quarrel there had been between Matthew Mortover and his father, the old man had forgotten or overlooked it, and had remembered the elder son who had gone away as equal beneficiary with the younger who had stayed at home. He glanced at the date of the will—it had been made some years after Matthew's departure from England to Canada—possibly, Matthew and his father had been in friendly communication. As to whether that supposition was correct, the detective knew nothing: what he did know was that Matthew was dead, and Stephen was dead. And in their place stood Matthew's daughter, the girl Avice, and Stephen's son, the young man Philip, each entitled to one-half of what, by the recent discovery of coal, had become a valuable property, how valuable, perhaps, none concerned in its development yet knew.

Wedgwood put the will safely away in his pocket-book, and marking the place in the old volume at which he had found it, put the volume itself aside. Then, reflecting that there might be an unusually hard and trying day before him on the morrow, and that it would be

well to follow Mr. Patello's example and get some sleep, he made up the fire again, and disposing himself in a couple of easy chairs on the hearth, composed himself as well as he could for slumber. He slept at last—soundly in the end, waking eventually to find the fire dying down, and Mr. Patello sitting up, woe-begone, on his couch, lamenting the cold and audibly wondering on what was going to happen next.

It was six o'clock in the morning then, and still dark as midnight; when daylight came Wedgwood saw that while the snow had ceased to fall, it had evidently continued during a greater part of the night and was piled up in deep masses about the house. Mortover Grange, in fact, was cut off from the world; snow-bound; he saw little chance of leaving it to prosecute his enquiries. From thence onward until nearly noon he and his companions could do no more than gaze from the windows on a white and silent world. Here and there, in the distance, they saw the smoke rising from the chimneys of some house or other whose inhabitants were in the same plight as themselves, but though Wedgwood, from an upper window, kept a careful look-out in the directions in which he believed the roads to lie, noon had passed before he saw a sign of any human figure. Then, painfully struggling through the drifts from a

point higher up the Valley, he caught sight of a man whose objective was evidently Mortover Grange.

As this man came nearer, Wedgwood saw him to be a shepherd, accompanied by a lurcher dog, and when the man turned in at the gate of the courtyard he hurried down to the door to meet him. The two women and Mr. Patello had also seen him coming and were at the door before Wedgwood; the man was already speaking to them when he got there.

"So Mrs. Baxter, up there at the Drovers' Arms, seeing as I was coming this way, she said would I just drop in and see if Mr. Philip had got home all right," he was saying. "'Cause, of course, the storm was that bad when he left there——"

"Mr. Philip isn't here at all," answered Mattie Patello. "He's never been home!" She turned to Wedgwood, helplessly. "You talk to him!" she said. "I don't understand——"

"You've come down from the Drovers' Arms, eh?" asked Wedgwood. "Just now?"

"Why, it's taken me an hour or two getting down, sir," answered the man. "But I had to come down this way, storm or no storm, and I called in at the Drovers' Arms as I was passing, and the landlady, Mrs. Baxter, she said

would I call in at Mortover Grange and just see if Mr. Philip got home all safe the other night, 'cause she'd been very anxious about him."

"What night was that?" asked Wedgwood. "Last night?"

"No—night before that, sir! He was up there at the Drovers' Arms while late—I saw him there, myself—in fact, I saw him set off home. He would go—though the storm was getting bad then, and Mrs. Baxter I heard her praying on him not to go out in—she was pressing on him to stay the night there. But he wouldn't—he wouldn't hear a word fro' nobody, and out into the storm he flung."

"Been drinking, I suppose?" suggested Wedgwood, giving the man a significant look.

"Why, he'd had plenty, mister," assented the messenger. "I'd heard Mrs. Baxter tell him so, not so long before he flung out. I think that had set his back up, d'ye see—so that he wouldn't listen to her when she begged him to stay the night and go to bed there and then. He'd a queer temper if he were crossed or affronted."

"What time would it be when he left the Drovers' Arms?" asked Wedgwood.

"Getting on to closing time—ten o'clock," replied the man.

"And the night was pretty bad?"

"It were bad enough for me, mister, and my road home from there is pretty plain sailing! It would be worse down this way. And it depends, of course, which way he took, to come home by. If he came down the road, same that I've fared by this morning, he could have got through, likely, if he hadn't tumbled into a ditch by the roadside. But if he went t'other way"—he stopped, shaking his head. "Bad enough on any dark night is that way," he said, "but in a storm like this——"

"What way's that?" asked Wedgwood.

The man turned from the door and pointed up the valley towards the range of hills on its further side.

"You see right up yonder, mister, where there's a cleft in the hillside, and the top of a house standing clear against the sky?" he asked. "That's the Drovers' Arms—the high-road from Harslow to Ruxton crosses there. Well, the short cut here is from just behind the inn all along that hillside—nothing more than a bridlepath, it is, and needs care in following it at night. And there's old quarries all along there—old, disused stone-quarries. In this snow——"

"He could easily have fallen over?" said Wedgwood. "Is that it?"

The man gave him a meaning glance.

"It's a difficult path for a sober man, that, mister," he answered. "And as I said before, he'd had plenty when he left Mrs. Baxter's."

"Where are you going, now?" enquired Wedgwood.

"Further down the valley," said the man.

"What's it like—on the road, out there? Can one get along?"

"Why, if you don't mind a bit of a struggle with it, you can! It's not so bad down here as it is higher up."

Wedgwood made himself ready and succeeded in reaching the highroad. Under his companion's guidance he got to a point where there was a long view down the road towards Netherwell, and there, pausing to rest awhile, he was aware of three dark figures slowly coming along in his direction. He pointed them out to the drover, who, sharper of eye than himself, glanced at them and let out one sharp word.

"Police!"

Wedgwood ploughed his way further along, and eventually made out the figures of the Netherwell Superintendent and two stout constables; far down the road behind them, he saw what he guessed to be a motor-car. Presently the Superintendent recognized him and waved his hand.

“Heard anything?” asked Wedgwood as they met. “I mean—since last night?”

The Superintendent, panting from his exertions, nodded.

“A man came in from these parts this morning,” he answered, “with a story of having seen that housekeeper at Mortover Grange and a gentleman on a lonely part of the moor, near the new colliery works, night before last, lost, and uncertain about their way—they wanted to get back to the Grange. He told them as best he could, but yesterday, he says, the postman who had made his way to the Grange during the morning, told him that a young woman there had told him that Mrs. Clagne and a gentleman she had gone out with the night before had never returned. So this man, my informant, thought we ought to know, and I set out with these two men—our car’s stuck, down yonder—snow’s too deep to get further. What’s your news?”

“Pretty much what yours is,” said Wedgwood. “Mr. Levigne and Mrs. Clagne left Mortover Grange night before last at five o’clock: they were to return at eight. They never did: they’ve never been heard of since. And young Mortover is missing, too—this man’s just brought some news of him.” He retailed the drover’s account of Philip. “What’s to be

done?" he asked. "Something's happened to all three of them, of course!"

"Doesn't the girl at the Grange know where Levigne and Mrs. Clagne were going?" asked the Superintendent. "Hasn't she any idea?"

"Not a notion! But I have!" replied Wedgwood. "From what she says, Levigne and Mrs. Clagne had been squabbling or quarrelling all the afternoon, evidently about business matters. She—this girl—saw papers. She says they seemed to come to some agreement about tea-time, and went out. My belief is that they went somewhere to get somebody to witness signatures—there are houses in the neighbourhood. Then they got caught in the storm, returning. They may be snow-bound—it's waist-high round Mortover Grange."

The Superintendent turned, looking back in the direction of his car.

"If they'd been merely snow-bound in some house hereabouts they'd have contrived to let that girl know," he said. "No—there's been some accident—in both cases. The only thing is search. There's a roadside inn down yonder—the Coach and Four. We'd better get back there, and see about getting some of the men of the neighbourhood to look round and enquire—they'll know their way about better than we shall. We shall find plenty of them, too, down

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there at the inn I guess—they can't work, this weather."

In this supposition the Superintendent was right; the inn was filled with men, enforcedly idle. Many of them were men working on the sinking of the new colliery; some of them were workers in the adjacent stone-quarries. All were dwellers in the neighbourhood, and the Superintendent began to make enquiries amongst them as to any news of Levigne and Janet Clagne.

None of these men had seen either on the night in question, though both were well-known to all. One man spoke to seeing Levigne earlier in the day; he had passed him, riding in a cab, he said, on the road going towards Mortover Grange. But as to the evening and the night that followed it nobody could say anything: the storm had kept folk indoors.

"Is there any idea as to where they might have gone when they set out from the Grange, mister?" a man asked of Wedgwood, who had explained what he knew of the missing persons' movements. "If us fellows had a notion of that, now——"

"They might have gone to Mr. Malcolmson's," replied Wedgwood. "Where does he live?"

"If you'll come outside, on the road, I'll

show you," answered the man. He led Wedgwood and the Superintendent to the front of the inn and pointed across the valley to a low ridge of hillside that rose beyond the works of the colliery. "Do you see a house up yonder, edge of a wood?" he asked. "That's Malcolmson's! A roughish way it 'ud be, too, that night—either going there or coming back—worse, of course, coming back, if they bided there any length of time. It started to be real bad that night between six and seven."

"How do you get up there?" asked the Superintendent.

"Well, from Mortover Grange you'd go up a lane that cuts across where they're making the new coal-pit," replied the man. "Malcolmson's house lies right behind the new works—overlooks 'em. Of course that lane's choked with snow—still, you could make your way there, with a bit o' discomfort."

The Superintendent turned back into the inn, and getting the men together, invited them to form search parties amongst themselves and to scour the districts in which Levigne and Janet Clagne in one direction and Philip Mortover in another had last been heard of. He had no difficulty in getting a ready response; in a few moments various parties were off, and he and Wedgwood essayed the climb up the hillside

to the manager's house. They reached it with difficulty—and heard news. Levigne and Janet Clagne had visited Malcolmson about six o'clock on the night before last; they wanted him to witness their signatures to what Levigne said were some legal documents; that done, they had stayed awhile, talking about the colliery; they had gone away together about seven, Levigne remarking that he had a cab coming to the Grange at eight as he wanted to catch the night train to London. The storm was getting bad, said Malcolmson, about the time they left, but he had lent them lanterns, and he could see no reason why they shouldn't have reached Mortover Grange in safety. Of course, if they'd got lost and gone wandering about that was a different matter—he'd heard nothing of them. Yesterday, and that morning, however, he had never been out—the storm had stopped all work, and he had kept to his fire-side. But there were cottages near the new colliery, and there were huts, where the navvies lived who were engaged in sinking the shafts, and he turned out now with Wedgwood and the Superintendent and went with them to these places to make enquiries.

It was the middle of the afternoon when Wedgwood got back, still in company of the Superintendent, to Mortover Grange. They

had heard nothing. But when they came in sight of the old house, they knew that something had been heard there. There were men at the door, and men in the courtyard—the men whom they had sent off, searching, from the roadside inn. And as they drew near one man detached himself from his fellows and came to meet them. He shook his head.

“We’ve found him!” he announced in a hushed voice. “Young Mr. Mortover, I mean. It’s a bad job—he’d been dead a good while when we came across him! Fallen over the edge o’ one of them old quarries—broken his neck, I should say.”

“Where have you taken him?” asked the Superintendent.

The man nodded at the house.

“We carried him straight down here,” he answered. “The women’s busy with him—laying him out.”

Wedgwood went straight into the Grange and upstairs. Through an open door he saw two countrywomen busied about a bed. Before he could enter, Mrs. Patello, her eyes wide with amazement, came from the room and beckoned him along the corridor. She seized him by the arm.

“Mr. Wedgwood!” she whispered. “You’ve heard? They carried him home, dead! Philip

Mortover! But—that's not Philip Mortover that's lying dead there! It's Walter Clagne—Janet's boy! He's the Clagne birthmark on his left arm. I saw it on his father, and I saw it on him when he was a baby! Not Philip Mortover at all—Walter Clagne, Janet's boy!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Before Wedgwood had realized the full meaning of Mrs. Patello's announcement she had seized him by the arm and was drawing him towards the room he had just passed.

"Come!" she said in a hushed whisper. "Come and look for yourself! I'll show you—but there's no doubt about it. And to think she's kept it a secret, all these years. Of course, I knew at once!"

The detective followed her into the room; at a word from her the two women busied about the still figure on the bed drew aside. Mrs. Patello, beckoning to Wedgwood to come closer, laid back the linen from the dead man's left arm and pointed to a curiously shaped brown mark that showed plainly above the elbow.

"The Clagne birthmark!" she whispered. "His father had it—in just the same place. I've heard him—Clagne, Janet's husband—say that they all had it—every Clagne, man and woman. I saw it on him—I saw it on this boy when he was a baby. Mr. Wedgwood—this is Walter Clagne, Janet's own son!"

"Then——" began Wedgwood. "She——"

"I told you that she said her own child died! That's been a lie—it must have been Philip Mortover that died! She had both of them, you remember, in her care. And now it's plain to me—she made out that this lad, her own son, was Philip and brought him up as Philip! But—there it is!"

She pointed again to the birthmark and drawing the sheet over the dead man, left the other women to complete their task. Outside the room she turned on Wedgwood.

"What made her do that?" she asked, almost fiercely. "That deception—all these years! Not a suspicion of it on anybody's part!"

"I think it's plain to see, Mrs. Patello," said Wedgwood. "She wanted the Mortover Estate for her own son. Well—Walter Clagne or Philip Mortover—and I've no doubt whatever about what you say—he's gone! But—what about her?"

"You've heard nothing?" she asked anxiously.

"They were at Malcolmson's house, up the hillside across the valley, at seven o'clock night before last," replied Wedgwood. "The storm was beginning to get bad when they left there. And a man saw them at some point in the district that same night, after they'd left Malcolm-

son's, lost, and enquiring their way—that is, they enquired it from him. They were then at the back of the new colliery works. And that's the last we've heard of them."

"They're lost!" said Mrs. Patello. She made a gesture of her hand towards the room they had just left. "Death!" she muttered. "Death all round—it's a judgment!"

Wedgwood made no reply to that: sentimental reflection was not to his taste. He went downstairs again and told the Superintendent what he had just heard.

"All of a piece with what I know of Janet Clagne," he concluded. "She seems to have been a schemer all her life. But the thing is—where are those two? It's getting on to forty-eight hours since they were seen or heard of!"

"They've come to grief somehow, somewhere," said the Superintendent. "And with all this thickness of snow it may be days before they're found. However, we've heard nothing yet from the men who went up to search round the new colliery. The man who came to me said that he'd told them of a short cut across there, and it's struck me that they may have come to grief amongst the workings. For instance, I know there were trial pits sunk here and there—I saw them myself one time when I was up

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here. They may have fallen into one, in wandering about."

"Not much use speculating," said Wedgwood. "If we could only get on their track—alive or dead, I want to lay hands on Levigne! He's papers on him that I want to see!"

"Nothing for it but waiting!" remarked the Superintendent.

But even then the period of waiting was nearly over. As the two men warmed themselves at the kitchen fire, discussing events with Mr. Patello who was all aghast at these tragic happenings a man came hurrying in with news evident in his every action. Blunt and business-like he voiced his tidings as soon as he caught sight of the Superintendent.

"We've found 'em!" he exclaimed, almost cheerfully. "Nice job we've had, an' all, up yonder, but we came across 'em, at last. What there is left of 'em, that is!"

"What do you mean?" demanded the Superintendent. "Left of them——?"

"Well, there's naught but their dead bodies," answered the messenger, unconcernedly. "And they're frozen as stiff as boards! Been dead a good while, I should say—both!"

"Where are they?" asked Wedgwood.

“Up yonder, amongst the new workings,” replied the man. “There’s some temp’ry buildings up there—sheds, and such-like—and they’re in one o’ them. According to what we could make out, they must ha’ crept in there for shelter when the storm was at its height, night before last, and whether it were the weight o’ snow, or the wind, or whatever it were, that there building collapsed, d’ye see—anyway, we found ’em buried among the ruins. Nice job we had to get ’em out, too!”

“We’ve carried them into the new engine-house,” said the man. “Mr. Malcolmson’s there. He sent me down to see if you were here, and to tell you to come up. But of course you can’t do no more than look at ’em.”

An hour later, after a hard struggle through the snow, Wedgwood and the Superintendent were taken by the colliery manager into the place where Levigne and Janet Clagne, partners in death as in certain episodes of life, lay side by side, crushed and maimed and still clothed as when the search party came across them. And Wedgwood, sternly business-like, went straight to the point he wanted to reach, and within a minute of entering the room had drawn a quantity of papers from an inner pocket of Levigne’s coat.

“That’s where he put the papers that Mrs.

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Clagne signed and that he and I witnessed," whispered the colliery manager. "That blue one."

Wedgwood turned away from the dead, and motioning the Superintendent to go aside with him, began to examine the papers in the light of the lanterns they had carried.

"There'll be something here that'll throw some illumination on things," he muttered. "If only I could find out . . . well, let's see what they are?"

The Superintendent watched curiously while Wedgwood rapidly looked each paper over, murmuring its drift and contents.

"This is the thing Malcolmson witnessed," muttered Wedgwood. "Statement by Janet Clagne that it was within her knowledge that after Matthew Mortover went to Canada he several times corresponded with his father, Gilson Mortover, informed him of his marriage to Louisa Patello and of the birth of his child Avice, and that through these letters Gilson became reconciled to Matthew again. Now what's been Levigne's object in getting that paper out of Janet Clagne? Ah, I see—he wanted it as a proof to the court in making that application on behalf of Avice Mortover! Well, that's that—now, what are these? Evidently the papers that Avice Mortover referred

to when she told Nottidge that Levigne had got her signature to some documents. Here's one covenanting, if her claim to the Mortover estates is successful, to pay Levigne fifty thousand pounds!"

"For his trouble, I suppose?" said the Superintendent.

"And his cleverness! What's this, now—a somewhat similar document, covenanting in consideration of Philip Mortover and Janet Clagne giving every assistance in establishing her claim to settle on Philip Mortover, in the event of the claim being successful, one-half the estate. Um—Levigne seemed to have been pretty good at arranging matters, and it was high time this girl was got out of his hands. But these are not what I wanted! And these?" he went on, as he drew two or three folded papers from an envelope. "By God—they are!"

"What—what?" asked his companions, excitedly. "What are they?"

"Papers given by Avice Mortover to John Wraypoole, which Wraypoole had on him at the time he was murdered in Miss Tandy's flat!" exclaimed Wedgwood. "These are they! Look here!" he went on, seizing the Superintendent's arm and swinging him round in the direction of the table on which the dead man

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and dead woman lay. "One of these two was the actual murderer of John Wraypoole! One—but even now I don't know which!"

And in that uncertainty Wedgwood remained for some time. But months later, when the Mortover Grange affair had been relegated to the usual fate of all nine days' wonders, and Avice Mortover had been established in her property and had married Nottidge, the detective, chancing to meet Mr. Patello in Bloomsbury, took him into the police-station, and after a little desultory chat about nothing, showed him some curiosities of criminal association, and amongst them a billhook.

"Ever seen anything like that, Mr. Patello?" he asked. "Look at it!"

Mr. Patello handled the thing with faint curiosity.

"Well, I don't know, sir," he answered. "Wood-chopper, of course. And very like one that somebody stole from my wood-shed last year. Any particular interest attached to it, sir?"

"Oh, nothing much!" replied Wedgwood. "A man was murdered with it—that's all!"

